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THE

Transfiguration of Life

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

THE REV. EDWARD S. ATWOOD, D.D.

A Memorial Volume

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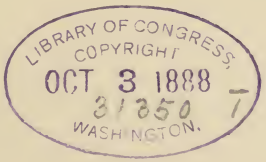

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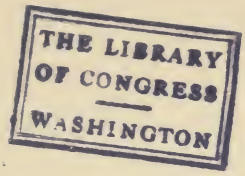

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* We voyage together for a little while,
Along the pathways of the restless sea,
But when the welcome shore is gained
We part. Be it not so
When o'er the stormier tides of life
We each have passed: then on the eternal strand
Together and forever may we stand.

E. S. ATWOOD.

* In passengers' note-book, on board Steamer William Penn, Atlantic voyage, June, 1867.

Boston, May, 1888.

Dear Mrs. Atwood: —

When the Monday Club met on May 21st, though all within reach were present, the numbers were not full. Two were on the great waters; but we thought most of the one who had pushed out across the narrow stream, this side the land where there is no more sea. We had been very near to each other in spirit the past few days. . . . So we sat together and talked of him, all that he was to us, his fresh wit and genial humor, his abounding friendliness, his manly faith in Christ, and Christ-like love for men. We spoke of his presence and share in the great gatherings of the Church, his glowing pleas for noble causes. How well we knew that keen insight, broad judgment, and marvelous gift of speech. . . . We want to ask you to grant us some memorial of this friend of ours and of so many: a book which shall keep chosen sermons, tell something of his life, and perhaps give the features of the bright vanished face. Some of our number will consult with you and, if the request is granted, try to relieve you of all care in this loving work. . . .

Faithfully yours,

Charles M. Southgate.	*William R. Campbell.*
Addison P. Foster.	*Edward B. Mason.*
David Gregg.	*David O. Mears.*
Frank E. Clark.	*W. G. Sperry.*
William Elliot Griffis.	*A. E. Dunning.*
Theodore J. Holmes.	*DeWitt S. Clark.*

George M. Boynton.

To the Monday Club : —

Your note, so full of kindest sympathy, has been received, and I wish to thank you for it. . . . The thoughtful and generous request for the materials for a "memorial" volume will be granted by us all, most willingly, and of course we shall be very glad to aid you in any way that seems best.

Very sincerely yours,

Elizabeth M. Atwood.

Salem, June, 1888.

IN MEMORIAM.

This memorial, of our brother's own creating, is only set in place by loving hands. They, simply carving his name upon it, know how much better his taste and skill would have chosen its site and surroundings; but it will be noticeable anywhere. Other and possibly finer materials might be selected, for he was prodigal in such work, though never thinking of his own fame the while. What he planned not for, friendship must secure. To keep a little longer — at least for the generation that knew him, either personally or by reputation — the gifted mind and heart, though the graceful and noble form in which they dwelt has been forever caught away from us, is the purpose of this volume. "He being dead, yet speaketh," not in memory merely, but to many now, perchance, who never saw him in the flesh. He may preach as pertinently, beautifully, persuasively, as ever. It is our privilege to give the mute lips voice.

Edward Sumner Atwood was born in Taunton, Massachusetts, June 4, 1833. His parents were of that strong, intellectual Christian type not rare in New England, and prominent in church and social circles. He was graduated with honors at Brown University in 1852. Like the earlier Chrysostom, he abandoned the career of the rhetorician, for which he seemed to have peculiar fitness, for the higher duties of the gospel ministry. Graduating from the Andover Theological Seminary in 1856, he was ordained pastor of the Congregational

church at Grantville (now Wellesley Hills), Massachusetts, October 23, the same year. Of his service there for eight years, his successor said: "In the enthusiasm of his youth-time, at the age of twenty-three, he came to the pastorate in this place to help you in all the best and holiest things. And he did help you. Some of you send to him in his too early tomb, or, rather, in the glorious home to which he has passed through it, the memorial of your thanks for many an uplifting word, many a brotherly prayer, with which he tried to start you, or to keep you on the way to that land of light into which he has so quickly preceded you. You have to thank God for a good pastor in him."

In 1864 he was called as colleague with the venerable Brown Emerson, D.D., of the South Congregational Church, in Salem, Massachusetts. The full duties of the pastorate soon devolved upon him, which he discharged till the very day of his death. It was a period of labor, like the path of the just, growing brighter and more valuable to its close, which was to him the perfect day.

A brilliant writer, through whose vigorous and thoughtful sentences there played a keen humor; a most engaging speaker, having always the felicitous word upon his tongue; an able organizer and executor, carrying plan and detail to its happy and successful issue, ready for any task that could bring help or comfort to the burdened; a sympathetic friend of old and young, of the eminent and the obscure, he grew into an assured and most important position in a community where talent and worth were not exceptional. The public schools of his city were the broader in culture and the more efficient for his generous counsels. He was originator, secretary, or president, through nearly its entire history, of the Essex Congregational Club. The great missionary societies of the denomination sought him; the American

Board, as a member of its Prudential Committee; the Massachusetts Bible Society, as a trustee; association, convention, and council, as preacher and speaker; while upon him came very naturally and "daily, those things that are without, the care of all the churches." His Alma Mater very properly honored him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1883. A representative of the best forms of our intense modern life, his physical powers, as is too often the case, faltered under the strain to which they were put. Subject to frequent and serious attacks of disease, the fatal summons came on Saturday afternoon, May 13, 1888, as he sat at the table with his family. Calling for them to gather about him as he consciously passed into the shadows, he sunk peacefully away and yielded up his spirit before the morning broke.

"I like to preach," he once said to a brother minister. "When I get to heaven I don't know what I shall do if I don't have a chance." Had he forgotton the varied calls and services on which the ministering spirits of God are sent? Beethoven's dream of the celestial orchestra which he might conduct was a normal one, but not more so than ours, of vast multitudes listening to the glowing speech of him whose lips, touched with the coal from off the altar, are publishing as from no pulpit of earth, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

CONTENTS.

I.

PAGE

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF LIFE 11
(A Sermon for Every Day.)

II.

THE DIVINE CHRIST 29
(A Sermon of Doctrine.)

III.

THE CONTESTED WILL 51
(A Sermon from the Court-room.)

IV.

THE SONS OF GOD 75
(A Sermon to Christians.)

V.

"NOTHING BUT LEAVES" 93
(A Sermon from Nature.)

VI.

WHAT SHALL THIS CHILD BE? 111
(A Sermon for Children.)

VII.

Beloved for the Fathers' Sake 127
(A Sermon for Parents.)

VIII.

The Messenger and the Message 149
(An Ordination Sermon.)

IX.

Glory and Beauty 175
(A Sermon for Ministers.)

X.

Debtor to the World 197
(A Missionary Sermon.)

XI.

The Stone at the Door 221
(An Easter Sermon.)

I.

The Transfiguration of Life.

I.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF LIFE.

"*And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter and James and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.*" — MARK 9 : 2.

IT was not without reason that a mountain was selected as the locality of this remarkable incident in the history of our Lord. It was directly in the line of long precedent. From the beginning of the world the most signal manifestations of God had been made on lonely summits. It was on the peaks of Ararat that the covenant was made with Noah, and the glittering bow arched from horizon to horizon the seal set to the divine promise. It was on the bald shoulder of Moriah that the angel of Jehovah appeared to Abraham, and the rude altar which the patriarch built there was the hint and prophecy of the great temple which afterwards crowned the slope. It was on the towering heights of Sinai that God gave the law to Moses. It was among the awful crags of Horeb that the Lord strong and mighty passed by

before the prophet. It was on the crest of Calvary that the Redeemer was appointed to die. It was to be the culmination of the latter day glory that the mountain of the Lord's house should be exalted above the tops of the mountains. It was quite in accordance with the divine method of procedure that the manifestation of the deity of Jesus Christ should be made on a "high mountain apart."

Aside from the warrant of ancient custom, and perhaps the explanation of that custom, a mountain is especially adapted to these unique and striking revelations. There is completest solitude and silence, no sight or sound of the busy world to divert the attention of the man to whom God is pleased to disclose himself. There is pure air on these high-lifted slopes, no smoke or mist to distort or confuse the vision. There is a suggestion of other-worldliness in the gray stillness; the strife and fret of life have receded into remote distance, and the heavens have come nearer. So far as the influence of physical surroundings is concerned, no place so suitable as a mountain to fit a man to see and hear God.

There was, however, one peculiarity about this transfiguration of Jesus Christ of special impor-

tance. In other instances when God revealed himself to men, it was as a God outside of and apart from them, but it was the God in Jesus Christ who manifested himself in the splendor of the transfiguration. And very evidently the man Christ Jesus had something to do with bringing about that revelation. He was conscious that there was more to him than appeared on the surface ; that though to others he seemed only a man he was more than man, and he determined at the proper time and in a fit way to let his favorite disciples know what he knew so well himself. He could accomplish that purpose only under certain conditions, and one of those conditions seems to have been the choice of a proper place for the unveiling of his hidden glory, and what place so suitable as a high mountain apart? Nothing here to distract his thoughts, no crowd of lame and blind waiting to be healed, no accusers and critics challenging him to the sharp battle of question and answer, only the silent sky over him and the quiet night about him and the troubled world below him. He realized more vividly who he was, than he ever could in the daytime and in the noisy streets. Here in the solitude and stillness and remoteness from ordinary human

cares, he could rise to that supreme act of will, by which his inner nature was enabled to break through the confinement of his physical body and stand disclosed in all its wonder and splendor. A high mountain apart! Jesus Christ was no stranger to the possibilities of a place like that. He went up on to a mountain to teach his disciples and on to a mountain to pray for strength for himself. He knew the spiritual atmosphere of such localities. What other place should he select for the great marvel of the Transfiguration?

What was true of Jesus Christ is in a measure true of all of us. There is more to every man than appears at first sight and on the surface. These common lives which we live ourselves, and which we see lived all about us, are capable of being far broader and nobler and more wonderful. There are times when we are conscious of the fact. When now and then we sit down and think back over our past, and call up our weaknesses and failures and sins, and see what poor work we have made of living, we every one of us say to ourselves that we might have made a better record. There was no need that we should blunder and stumble in such wretched fashion. As

often pedestrians push and struggle and wander here and there for hours through the underbrush, and coming to some point of prospect, look back and see that there was one straight short path which they have missed, and have wasted time and strength in useless divergence to the right and left: so in moments of reflection, thoughtful men discover that they have not made the most of themselves, nor of their opportunities, that results in character are not at all proportionate to the force that has been expended. And every man is at the same time conscious that there is in him, and always has been, a wealth of sensibility and capacity and inwrought and infolded energy and possibility, which has never seen the light or been seen of men. You know what I mean. Is there one of us who would be perfectly satisfied with the world's estimate of us, if that estimate was based wholly and strictly on what we have already reached in character or accomplished in work? No, we say, and without conceit we have a right to say, there is more to us and better than we yet have shown. It is our own fault, doubtless, that we have made so poor an exhibit, but all the same and nevertheless there is that in us which is grander and higher than the best and most which

we have yet seen and done. It consoles us sometimes in our failures, to think that our lack of success has been due to weakness of will and errors of judgment, and not to deficiency of natural capacity, for that thought brightens the future with the light of large hope, but it oftener and with better reason saddens us to remember that with so much of material and so many chances of masterly achievement, we have made such journeyman's work of living. It is the great sorrow of human experience that it is consciously so much poorer in quality, and narrower in breadth, and less satisfying to recall, than it either need or ought to have been.

And so the great practical truth of which we all now and then get dim and partial glimpses grows sharp in outline and august in reality, — the possibility of the Transfiguration of Life, — in which the best that is in us, with the help of the best that is for us, the grace of God, shall get uppermost and outermost, and instead of being, as we so often are, the mere hints and suggestions of the men and women we were meant to be, all our immortal capacities will unfold and the divine grace and beauty which belongs to them will disclose itself and shine through the dust and

smoke of earthly surroundings, as the glory of the true Christ shone through the night shadows that shrouded the Holy Mount.

The poets sing to us now and then of a golden age to come, when humanity shall unmistakably evidence its divine origin, when men and women shall lose their selfishness and frivolity, their bitterness of spirit and narrowness of vision, and life shall be stately and calm and strong, and earth so like heaven that it will matter little where we are, whether here or there; and we are pleased to listen to the pathetic strains, but slow to believe, and with our hard matter-of-fact experience of this hard matter-of-fact world we say that these are a rhymester's dreams, not to be numbered among our hopes and certainly not to be accepted as our faith. And yet the possibility of a larger fulfillment than the largest prophecy, at least in personal experience, is face to face with every one of us. Not a man or woman here but may commence now and here the process that shall end in transfiguration; their hidden capacities quickened in action; the dim sparks of heavenliness within them kindled into clear and shining flame; the best possible to them actually realized, so that when seen in the home or the street, or the shops or the house of

worship, the world shall say of each of them, "There lives and moves a true child of God, in fashion like ourselves, but in temper and attainment most like Him who made them."

And mind you, friends, I am not talking about something fanciful or indifferent, but about a truth most practical that relates to a matter most practical. The world is always trying to better its condition. It inaugurates multitudes of enterprises, enlarges trade and commerce, brings new acres under cultivation, prospects and mines for mineral treasures hidden under the soil, increases its store of literature, lengthens the catalogue of its useful inventions, is ingenious and patient in its experiments, but after all never reaches the betterment which it desires. The trouble is, it is working in the wrong direction; trying to add the most possible to what men have, instead of trying to make the most possible of what men are; and simple accumulation is not the medicine for the universal heart-sickness of humanity.

We call our age one of marvelous privilege in its varied and wonderful ministries to so many shades of the common want, and yet to-day, even among the most favored classes in society, you find

the same unrest and dissatisfaction of which men complained in earlier and ruder times. Wealth and taste line the streets with fine houses, and the people who live in them, in spite of their luxurious surroundings, are groping and hungering for something to satisfy their unappeased cravings. Men seek relief for their discontent in change of scene, but their souls travel farther and faster than their bodies; their unrest outruns the locomotive and the steamship, and though they sit under the shadow of the great mountains, or walk within hearing of the infinite laughter of the sea, or mingle with the gay congress of pleasure-seekers which midsummer assembles, yet in frank hours they confess that they have not found the content they seek. What fugitive from his home can escape from himself? The mind is its own place.

It was the experience of the Transfiguration that prepared Jesus Christ for the patient and even joyful endurance of the sorrows of Gethsemane and the pains of Calvary. It is only as men in their measure come into that same experience, by the outgrowth and overgrowth of the spiritual part of their nature, so that their immortality asserts itself in opposition to all the vexations and disquietudes of life, that they grow

into serenity, and into that just estimate of relative values which enables them out of simple content of heart to say, "None of these things move me."

But men never drift nor vegetate into transfiguration. It is reached only under conditions. There must be an intelligent comprehension of the end to be attained before intelligent measures to secure it can be taken. And for this men, like their Lord, must go up into a "high mountain apart." They must get away from the stir and confusion of busy life, and above the level of the debased estimates of popular theories, and look at and judge of things as they appear in the stillness and solitude and clear air of nearness to God.

No man ever comes into the experience of this transfigured life without much real reflection, and that is a rare thing. There is a great deal of thinking done in the world, but there is very little thoughtfulness. Our estimate of most things is superficial; our estimate of ourselves most superficial of all. The hours which we really give to profound searching of our personal needs and defects and possibilities are like mountains apart in their infrequency, and much more like mountains apart in the revelations and prospect which

their summits command. It is useless to hope for great spiritual attainments without long and profound communion with our own souls. The social life of our day is wonderfully stimulating, but it is unhealthy just so far as it discredits solitude and makes it seem tame and undesirable. It is when we keep close company with ourselves that we find out what we really are and, better still, what we may be and were meant to be. It was the testimony of the Psalmist: "While I was musing the fire burned, then spake I with my lips, Lord make me to know mine end." In our careless moods it is easy to think well of ourselves and to believe that we have made a long advance towards the perfection possible to us, but the deeper search of earnest thoughtfulness reveals to us how many of the higher capacities of our nature are undeveloped, not to say untouched, as yet, and the largeness of the life to which we may grow unfolds itself before us, as river and forest and lake and plain and village and wilderness unroll themselves in far-stretching landscape to one standing on some mountain summit. More thoughtfulness, dear friends, I plead for that; a better understanding of ourselves, a clearer comprehension of what God made us to be and

become. It is the inspiration and impulse that leads men to strive for a glorified life.

And along with that, and as an indispensable accompaniment to that, we need to go up on the high places of God's Word and see how things look from that point of view. The Scriptures are unique in many things, but in nothing more unique than in their estimate of men and their teachings of the proper use and true end of life. It is too much the fashion and the folly of this age to criticize the New Testament as antiquated and fanatical. It is true that its judgment of character and scheme of conduct is in broad contrast to the theories of living which the world at large adopts and commends, but it is to be remembered that whatever else the New Testament may or may not be, it is God's idea of human responsibilities and capabilities. If modern society objects to its outline and color, so much the worse for modern society. Its dissent does not alter the truth. It is when and only when men adjust their lives to the declared conditions of the God who made them and rules them that the forces of those lives have swift and easy play, and one after the other their possibilities develop into actual experiences, as the blossoms of lily

and rose unfurl their petals of crimson and pearl under the mighty impulses of growth and in the favoring light of the summer sun. There is no transfiguration of life possible to men who live on a lower level than this high mountain apart of Scripture. Their largest accomplishment is inevitably of the earth earthy. "Make all things," God said to Moses, "after the pattern shewed thee in the mount." Make all things in life, God says to men everywhere, after the pattern shown in this mount of the Holy Word; and individual character, and home behavior, and business conduct, and intellectual attainment, and social activities shall have on them the dawn and grow fast towards the fullness of the splendor of the perfect life of the heavens and the ineffable glory of God.

I stood two Sabbath nights ago on one of the slopes of the New Hampshire ranges, at the close of a cold gray day through whose long hours storm and brightness had been battling for possession of the sky. The heavens were slated with handbreadths of cloud overlapping each other, the breath of mist was in the air, the drops of the spent rain were dripping from the trees, the remoter peaks were scarcely distinguishable, the

nearer summits were sullen and forbidding, the scenes seemed set for the funeral of a dead world. But the day was not to go out in that mournful fashion. Suddenly by some breath of God the veil of obscurity was rent in twain from top to bottom, and in the uncovered light of the sun, unspeakable glories kindled and flamed. Each smallest cloud stood out in separate distinctness, an island with inland of crimson and beach of gold, and in and out through all the shining archipelago there was the wash and flow of amber seas. The mountains, flooded with purple light, were pyramids of amethyst and jasper. The air was tremulous and scintillant with motes of brightness. Patches of rainbow drifted here and there and vanished in a blaze of color. Look up or down, east or west, nowhere was found a spot untouched by the transfiguration of the hour, and I knew by actual vision what God could make of this old and worn earth.

But, beloved, what was that compared with knowing by experience what the transfiguration of life means? To so put ourselves and do our work in the light of the Sun of Righteousness that every thing in us shall share in his brightness; to have our needs and sorrows illumined with his gracious

love ; to see his grace make the humblest duty and the lowliest lot something fair and pleasant ; to feel within us the uplift and thrill of the growth of God-likeness ; to know that all that we are and do is becoming more and more divine in men's thought about us ; to be conscious of increase of spiritual power and enlargement of character, — this is no fleeting glory of sunset skies that charms for a moment and is gone, but the beginning of eternal day. To witness that is your privilege and mine. Do we believe in it? Do we long for it? Will we strive for it? This is living worth the name. May God turn all our hearts and faces towards it!

II.

The Divine Christ.

II.

THE DIVINE CHRIST.

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." — JOHN 1: 4, 5, 12.

THERE can be no reasonable question as to who it is of whom these words are spoken. This opening chapter of John's Gospel is a blending of simplicity and sublimity, a series of progressive statements, each lifting our thought a step higher, and each irradiated with the light that streams from him to whom they all lead, Jesus Christ the Son of God. Notice how the stately prologue commences and proceeds. "In the beginning was the Word." At once we are back in the silence and mystery of the far eternities, before the earth was. What else or who else there may have been in the dim solitude of that ancient epoch, we do not know, but "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Not merely in the same place with him. Both

the etymology and the grammatical construction forbid that limitation of meaning. The most intimate and divine sort of relation is indicated, inseparable nearness, and closest intercommunion; something like what we mean, when we say that a man is alone with himself. At the same time the phrase is so far obscure that it admits of a double interpretation, and this is a point in regard to which there must be no possible room for rational doubt, and so at the next step comes the statement, "And the Word was God."

That declaration is absolutely without flaw or seam in its wholeness; the five words in which it is made are bolted and riveted into the unity of a single block. They can mean only one thing; no torturing nor twisting can wring out of them any other significance besides that which lies on the face of them. Exhaust all the resources of human language, and you can not invent any phrase which will more forcibly and unmistakably assert the absolute Deity of this somebody who is called "the Word," than the simple statement of revelation, "And the Word was God." Let me find out who it is whom the inspired apostle calls "the Word," and in all honesty and all reason I must acknowledge him Lord, and worship him as

my Maker and my King. We do not have to wait long, for the evangelist goes on, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." Is there any possible doubt as to who it is of whom John is speaking? In the long course of human history has there ever been but one being who claimed to be the only begotten Son of God. It is a part of the common knowledge that Jesus Christ alone of men made that claim. Your little child is just as well acquainted with the fact as the philosopher or the theologian, and the apostle John says that this "Word made flesh," this Jesus Christ, was "in the beginning" and "was God." If you admit that the Bible is a divine revelation, and are willing to reverently accept and believe what that Bible teaches, and will deal in honest fashion with its plain and simple statements, there is but one way in which you can read this opening chapter of John's Gospel, and only one conclusion to which you can come in regard to Jesus Christ; and that is, that he is the divine Redeemer and Lord.

And this conclusion is so inevitable that those who are in the habit of asserting that Jesus Christ

is not God are anxious to find some way of getting rid of this portion of the Gospel, or at least to break the force of its statements. So there are some who, with great display of pretended scholarship, declare that the evidence of the genuineness of this Gospel is defective. It is an old artifice to get a troublesome witness out of the way. The claims of the Gospel of John to be a true Word of God have been in court century after century. They have been subjected to merciless criticism, they have been assailed with the bitterness of party spirit, but they have never been disproved. The Christian world has not yet seen any good reason for laying aside or doubting this precious portion of the New Testament. It still stands serene, supreme, immovable in the judgment and affections of those who sincerely desire to know the mind and will of God, and its teachings stand with it. Its words of comfort are not delusions that cheat us into a false peace. Its blessed provisions and promises for sinful and lost men are not frail rafts to which we trust ourselves at our imminent peril, and its doctrinal statements are worthy of unquestioning belief, especially that which blazes on its threshold and shines out from all its record of the life

and teachings of Jesus Christ. This fourth Gospel, with its all-sufficient vouchers of its heavenly origin, this fourth Gospel is preëminently the Gospel of the divinity of our Lord, and those who dispute or deny or dilute that doctrine are playing fast and loose with the sublimest utterances which ever came from Him who sits on the throne to be the ruler and judge of men.

But why? it is often asked, sometimes honestly, and sometimes petulantly — why lay so much stress upon this single doctrine? Why not be about more profitable business, and emphasize the practical matter of the virtues and the moralities? Why so earnestly and persistently pursue and press and plead this matter of the divinity of Jesus Christ? What great difference can it make whether we affirm or deny? Ah, friends! that is the infinite error into which men fall. No other truth in the holy Book is of such sovereign importance as this; no other teaching has so much depending on our assent or our dissent. That unique life of Jesus Christ, our text says, is "the light of men," and it is "the light of men" just and only because it was unique, without a parallel from the beginning of the world until now. Make out that Jesus Christ was the best

and wisest of men, and stop there, and you have smitten with dire and total eclipse the only real sun that ever rose on this dark world.

This doctrine of the divinity of our Lord is only a theological dogma, or an article in the creed! You might just as truly say that yonder sun riding in mid-heaven is only an astronomical fact, or a record in the nautical almanac. It is a light, the light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world. There are potencies and adaptations in this doctrine of the God-man, which meet and supply great wants of our nature which otherwise must go unanswered. There is a hunger of soul which no other bread can feed. There is a spiritual poverty which must always remain, and always grow poorer, if this teaching of the Incarnation be not true. We are and must forever remain in the deadness and darkness of sin, unless "for us men and for our salvation," God came down from heaven, was manifest in the flesh, "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Skeptics and scoffers know not what they do when they attempt to drag the Redeemer down to the level of a mere man, and assert that his teachings have no more authority than those of any other scholar or sage. In a recent notable

representative gathering of those who profess to be enlightened religious men, the chief speaker laid down the proposition, from which apparently no one dissented, "that the authority of our faith is found in the teachings of Jesus; not that they were original with him, but that he himself, realizing their truth, impressed their truth upon all who heard him. His authority rested upon his perception of truth and his ability to make others perceive it. The same authority rests in all men who stand in the light, and who, seeing the truth themselves, are able to give light to others as to duty, faith, hope, love, and life. Thinkers, poets, scholars, and reformers are our authorities: such men as Channing, Dewey, Emerson, Martineau, and others being those who have stood and stand on the heights, revealing to all the light which has been revealed to them."

I have no strictures to make upon those who advocate these views. To their own master they stand or fall. I desire to speak of the views themselves with due calmness and moderation, but it seems to me that men are engaged in an ill business, who are endeavoring to rob a lost world of its only Redeemer. There is not much gained by substituting star-gazing on the heights, and

such dim nebulæ of truth as may be discovered, for simple faith in a divine Saviour, and the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. Emerson and Martineau and Channing are great names in certain departments of human thought, but in my want and sin they can teach me nothing and help me none, and I turn away from them to Him of whom it is written in Scripture, "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things of the world below, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

I say without any hesitation, and I weigh my words when I say it — I say that you and I know just as much as Channing and Martineau and Emerson, or any of the hierarchy of modern apostles, and they know just as little as we; for apart from Scripture teaching no man knows

any thing about how a lost soul may be redeemed, or on what terms a sinner can be forgiven, or how a blessed immortality may be secured, or whether there is any immortality. The profoundest problems with which we are called to wrestle are outside the widest range of mere human thinking. A child might as sensibly undertake to survey and measure the infinities of space with the multiplication table for his calculus, as you and I to assume to unravel the great mysteries of the spiritual world with our speculations and philosophies. They are a mere fog and fume of words. We want knowledge, and we never know until we know Jesus Christ, true God and true man, "the light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world." I cannot find words strong enough to sufficiently emphasize the sovereign importance of this truth.

I repeat that it is no theological dogma which I am urging; it is a fact, the knowledge of which is the essential condition of real spiritual life and blessedness. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Now all souls intelligent enough to understand their needs, and

humble enough to confess their helplessness, reach out after this truth and accept it with measureless gladness. How profoundly they sympathize with the words of one of England's scholars, whose fame is world-wide: "My heart demands the doctrine as much as my reason. I want to be sure that God cares for us; that God is our Father; that God has interfered, stooped, sacrificed himself for us. I do not merely want to love Christ, a Christ, some creation or emanation of God, whose will and character, for aught I know, may be different from God's. I want to love and honor the absolute God himself, and none other will satisfy me, and in the doctrine of Christ being co-equal and co-eternal, sent by, sacrificed by his Father, that he might do his Father's will, I find it, and no puzzling texts shall rob me of that rest for my heart. If the doctrine be not in the Bible, it ought to be, for the whole spiritual nature of man cries out for it."

Charles Kingsley, referring to a gifted friend of his who rejected this truth, once said: "The more I see of him, the more I learn to love the true doctrines of the gospel, because I see more and more that only in faith and love to the Incarnate God our Saviour can the cleverest as well as the

simplest find the peace of God which passes understanding." A great crowd of witnesses whom no man can number attest the truth of that saying. By righteous character attained and holy work done under the inspiration of that truth, by sharp and fiery death welcomed in the defence of that truth, by hopes surmounting the blankness and silence of the grave, plumed and winged by faith in that truth, they have recorded their conviction that that divine life is the light of men. But it is said that there are many who do not accept that teaching. True, "the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not." I turn to the letter which the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and I read: "And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ should not dawn upon them."

This unfaith on the part of men was not unforeseen by God. But notice what is said about it: "The light shineth in the darkness;" not the darkness of ignorance only, but the darkness of prejudice and self-will and pride and worldliness and enmity to God, and it is no easy thing for

even divine light to penetrate these dense walls and shuttered windows, and stream in upon the soul. Out in the open field at midday, how freely and full the golden rain of the sunshine falls, and the brown earth and ancient rocks and quivering leaves and dancing blades of grass are aflame with the splendor; but in the dim cloister or the prison cell or the dingy cellar, how hard it is for even a stray beam of the light to find its way! Men's characters and theories and pursuits are often such that they present impassable barriers to the truth. The scholar may have such confidence in the conclusions of his own thinking, that he turns his back on the teachings of revelation. An unbeliever may be so bitter in his hatred or so pronounced in his contempt for evangelical religion, that the cloud of his dark mood hides even the light of God. A man of affairs may be so busy with the things of the earth that he never looks up to see whether there is a heaven, and sun and stars blaze in the firmament above him without his ever seeing them. Nothing strange that men do not see the light of Christ, when they so screen themselves from the light. But notice another thing that is said: "The light shineth in the darkness," and it is the darkness that does not

apprehend it. It is not as some would have us believe; it is not clear thought and sound reason and fair and plain interpretation of the New Testament in the simple interest of the truth, that fails to discover and accept the doctrine of a divine Saviour. It is the darkness that apprehends it not: the dark mind obscured with prejudice or opaque from false education; the dark heart full of willfulness and self-love, and impatient of restraint; it is the darkness that does not see the light. Never a greater misnomer than to give the name rationalism to a system that has for its foundation-stone the rejection of the claims of Jesus Christ. It is all only and always irrationalism from first to last. Never a more glaring folly than for men to sing praises to "sweetness and light" who can find neither light nor sweetness in an incarnate God and a divine Redeemer.

If any of you, friends, are refusing to believe in Jesus Christ as your adorable Lord, and are congratulating yourselves that you occupy an advanced position, and are imagining that your unfaith is the result of more generous culture and a clearer outlook which emancipates you from an old superstition, on the authority of God I say to you a thousand times No. Take the knowledge of

Jesus Christ out of this world of ours to-day and swift and utter darkness would follow. Governments founded in justice would crumble; the securities of civil order would vanish; the safeguards of business would be destroyed; virtue and morality would be expunged from the vocabulary; the sanctity of womanhood would be trampled in the mire; the worship of God would become the orgies of the brothel, and the bacchanal and saturnalian days of the ancient paganism would come back at once with their lurid light and their blasting fires. It is a wonder beyond measure that men who know any thing of history, or of the condition of the heathen world to-day, should dare unthread one least filament from the outmost fringe of the kingly robes of Jesus Christ. If from the beginning until now there has been any transforming, transfiguring power in the world, it is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If there have been any hands outstretched in help and healing over our poor bleeding humanity, they are the hands of Jesus Christ. If there have been any ethical systems that have had in them the elements of righteousness and permanency and force, they came from the teachings of Jesus Christ. If over the graves where our beloved are buried, and where we

ourselves are so soon to lie, any assured hopes have been lighted, whose flame the chill winds of death can not extinguish, and whose radiance streaming inward from the vestibule of the sepulcher illumines the infinite home beyond, where the good and true forever live and love, those hopes were kindled by the breath of the risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Is it knowledge not to know him just as he is, and all that he is? Is it evidence that we are advancing in clear thought because in our estimate of him he dwindles from the proportions of a God to the shrunken dimensions of a man? Have we made progress of which we have reason to be proud because we have come to the conclusion that his words are only human words, and he himself one of a company of scholars and poets up on the heights, finding out what he believes, so that he may be able to tell us? No honest man in his thoughtful hours can believe it. If this great light out of heaven has been kindled in the darkness of our lost world and we do not see it, it is not ours to boast, but to weep and pray for forgiveness and help for our blindness. The light is and shines, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; it is only darkness that apprehends it not.

There is still another aspect of this matter to be noted. As we read on in the text we find it written, "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." Our estimate of Jesus Christ, therefore, our attitude of mind and heart towards him, has a vital connection with our spiritual condition and prospects. It is an easy thing to call ourselves children of God; it is another thing to prove our right to the title. The apostle, in his letter to the Galatian church, writes: "For ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus;" and again he writes "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." If the New Testament is to be believed, the question whether we are children of God can not be answered in the affirmative simply because we possess certain excellences of character.

There are honest men in the world, and upright men and generous men, who make no claim that they are religious men. To be correct in one's habits and blameless in one's conduct is a most estimable thing, but being merely that does not

make me a child of God. The right to call myself that is not a natural but an acquired right, a right given to men on certain conditions; and who has either the right or the power to determine those conditions, save He by whose sovereign grace and favor alone it is that any are admitted into the family of God? We need to keep in mind the wide difference there is between being virtuous and being accepted as a child of the Highest. One is wholly dependent upon our personal conduct, the other depends upon the consent of God; and yet these two things are sadly confused in the popular thought. Men who utterly reject Jesus Christ as their Redeemer and Lord insist upon being called Christians because they practice the ethics of Christianity. But no excellency of behavior constitutes a claim upon God, to make us his children. We reach that honor and privilege on his own terms, or not at all. If we desire to come into the blessed experience and rights of real and acknowledged sonship, there is only one way to accomplish it. There on the pages of divine revelation flames the invariable and unalterable condition: "As many as receive Jesus Christ, to them gives he the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name."

But you say this is bigotry. It is the bigotry of holy Scripture. But you say this is a narrow theory. It is a theory for whose narrowness God is responsible. But you say it is unfair. Then it is your Maker and Judge who is not just, and you must carry your appeal to his bar. But you say it is a conceited assumption of superiority on the part of the Church. It is a fact announced by those divine lips that speak nothing but truth. But you say we will have nothing to do with your doctrine. It is not with us but with God that you part company. Criticism, satire, reproach, dissent, bluster, bravado, none of these things make any impression upon the established laws of the moral universe. Railing against gravitation will not prevent a building that is out of plumb from falling. Storming against the conditions of divine grace will not put into place a soul that is out of place. If we are truly children of God, it is unalterably and everlastingly certain that "we are the children of God, through faith in Jesus Christ."

What more present and pressing duty then, friends, rests upon us than our obligation to believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that in Jesus Christ we have a divine Redeemer

and Lord, and, putting aside old prejudice and pride of opinion and fictions of speculation and false human creeds, to find the warrant of our reasonable faith in those simple words, "Thus saith the Lord"?

Is it a stern and joyless truth which we are asked to embrace? Does it afflict us to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who was hungry and cold and homeless, who was despised and abused and suffered, just as it often happens to us, who knew all the bitterness that human life can ever know, — does it afflict us to believe that he was "God manifest in the flesh," and so the infinite sympathy of common experience exists between us and God, who knows how to bear our grief and carry our sorrows, having been tried in all points as we are? Does it pain us to think that the words which Jesus spoke came from the lips of a divine speaker, and so are of unquestioned authority? Is it a hardship to believe that by simple heart-trust in that Christ we are given the right to call ourselves the children of God, and to know that we are heirs to the richness of divine grace now and the wonders of divine glory hereafter?

Certainly we have no cause to complain of a revelation like that, so surprising, so sufficient, so

satisfying. Rather let us thank God that he has kindled such a light in the darkness, and opened our hearts to let its brightness stream in upon us. So life's troubled sea shall lie like the ocean in a midsummer noon, with every crest and surge transfigured with radiance from the open heavens, and when He who once walked a man among men "shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation," our lips that have learned the song by earthly experience of the truth shall join the high acclaim that rolls forever about his throne, and hail him "King of kings, and Lord of Lords."

III.

The Contested Will.

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THE CONTESTED WILL.

"*The New Testament.*" — HEBREWS 9: 15.

THE attention and interest of the whole community has been greatly excited during the last ten days by the trial in our courts of law of a contested will case. Eminent counsel from far and near were retained by both appellant and appellee. Witnesses from the ordinary walks of life and from the learned professions were summoned by either side to give out of their knowledge or experience evidence bearing upon the matter at issue. The representatives of the press carefully watched and noted down the proceedings, and day by day the metropolitan journals announced the progress of the trial to hundreds of thousands in all parts of the land.

The interest of our own community evidenced itself in the crowds that pressed to get within hearing distance of counsel and witnesses, overflowing all the ordinary limits assigned by the decorum of the court-room to the public, taxing

to the utmost the complaisant good nature of the officers of the law and the members of the bar. And yet of all the hundreds who day after day assembled within those walls, not more than five or six individuals at the most had any immediate personal interest in the issue of the cause. That bit of paper about which such a controversy was waging was nothing to them. No man or woman of them all would be a cent richer or poorer whichever way the case went. It was the trial and its accessories that excited their interest.

Watching as I had opportunity the progress of the cause from day to day, and sharing in the eagerness which others felt in regard to it, it occurred to me to speak to you this morning of another will case now in process of trial before the Supreme Court of human opinion; a case in whose issue each man has a most pressing personal concern, and yet a case in which each man assumes to be a juror; a case in which each man is counsel on both sides, his sinfulness and deep spiritual need pleading that the will should stand, his selfishness and evil heart arguing that it should be set aside; a case famous on account of its antiquity, it having been on

trial for centuries; a case important because of the vast estates in question; a case impressive because he who sits as judge of the proceedings, and to whose ruling no exceptions can be taken, is God the Judge of all; and yet a case in which so far as it relates to their immediate personal welfare, the great majority of men feel the least possible interest. In the contrariety of its aspects, in its self-contradictions, in the strange endeavor of the heirs at law to argue themselves out of their own property, in the insane and frantic desire of the legatees to break the will, and at the same time their seeming indifference to the whole matter of the will, the case is without a parallel in the records of jurisprudence.

The will in question purports to be the "Will and Testament of Jesus Christ." I do not propose to read it, on account of its length, and it is not necessary, as an attested copy of it is in the hands of every member of this congregation, all of whom ought to be familiar with it. It is summarily contained in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of the Gospel of John. It begins with the comforting words, "Let not your hearts be troubled," and it ends with the comforting assurance, "Be of good cheer, I

have overcome the world." In a larger and yet just sense the whole of the Four Gospels are a part of this will, for they are made up of the spoken declarations of Christ in regard to it, and the record of significant actions that go to show his cherished purpose in the matter. So also the writings of the apostles are to be added to the body of the document, for they are the explanations of the personal friends of Christ who knew his whole mind in the matter. And so not without reason we commonly style this whole collection of papers as the "New Testament" of Jesus Christ.

There are some peculiarities about this will that make it more notable than any other that was ever written.

In the first place, it is a wonderfully large estate of which it professes to dispose. No such inventory of property was ever found in any other will presented for probate. We have in this country only a few men who are possessed of what are called large fortunes, and we over-estimate their property. Look at the estates of our few millionaires, taking them at their own estimate. Their property consists in part of real estate, which fluctuates in value continually; that

which is worth a great deal now may be worth little or nothing by-and-by. Men talk about the permanency of judicious investments in real estate, and yet all history shows that land which you must flow with gold in order to buy to-day, a century hence may possibly be bought for a song. Eligible building lots in Carthage and Nineveh and Babylon once had their value per foot quoted at prices that would frighten a Wall Street broker, but to-day they would not bring a penny an acre.

Another part of the millionaire's property consists of bonds and stock certificates, but that which secures to-day ten, twenty, forty per cent. dividends, fifty years from now may be so much waste-paper. Another part of the property, perhaps, consists of things that seem more substantial: houses, ships, plate. But some Chicago fire that eats up the building and bankrupts the insurance company dissipates in smoke the value of the house, and the cyclone sinks ships and cargo, and the burglar makes way with plate. Nothing that we call property has permanent value. There are men by thousands in New York who ten years ago rolled in luxury, who to-day are thankful to earn their bread. It is

entirely different with the estate to dispose of which this will is drawn. "Durable riches" this is called, treasure which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves steal. Fire can not burn it; seas can not sink it; time instead of depreciating, only and always increases, its value.

Furthermore, it is property which invariably ennobles the man who possesses it. Those who inherit under this will become "kings and priests unto God, and reign with him for ever and ever." They live in a style becoming their rank, "for God hath prepared for them a city," and that city, as we are told in the will, is one of such magnificence that, compared with it, the most splendid cities of the world are mere collections of mud-huts; the inhabitants wear kings' garments and eat angels' food.

And what adds immensely to the value of the property, it is permanent. A man rich under the provisions of this will is even richer the other side of the grave than he is this. To him death is only a key with which he unlocks vaster treasure houses. Forever and forever his wealth is to go on increasing, with never a break or a drawback to the constant gain. Wonderful estate! The most absolute sovereign has no such property at his disposal.

Another peculiarity of this will is that any body who pleases may have his name added to the list of heirs. There are no questions asked as to his nationality or his family connections, or as to his being already rich, or whether he has ever rendered any service to the Testator. The fact that he desires to be one of the heirs is enough. Whosoever will, let him come and take. Still more, every body is invited to become an heir. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, I counsel thee to receive of me gold tried in the fire. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. Hearken unto me and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness; Come, for all things are ready. And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. And if children then heirs, heirs of God to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. And each one may have just as much of the property as he pleases. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, it shall be done unto you. And yet

however much any one receives, it does not in the least reduce the portion of the rest. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, and yet there is room. There need be no wrangling about such a will as this, no scrambling or jealous heirs afraid that some one will get more than his portion, no attempt of any to wrest from others their allotment under the provisions of the will. There is property enough for each one to have all that he desires, and still leave enough to satisfy all the rest.

This is such a strange will that we naturally ask how it came to be made? Was it a freak of insanity? Was any undue influence brought to bear upon the Testator and the will thus vitiated? The very first words of the will answer these questions, and give the reasons why it was made as it was. "God so loved the world;" that was the origin and the inspiration of it. God's pity for a needy, dying race moved God's heart. We sometimes see men whose impulses move them in somewhat the same direction. Girard founds a college, and Peabody

builds tenement houses, and others endow hospitals and houses of refuge for the good of people they never expect to see. This wonderful will of Christ came out of the wonderful heart of Christ. It is a love testament. No meaner motive went to its making. It was not to leave behind him the reputation of having been wonderfully benevolent, so that his fame as a benefactor would be handed down from age to age, that Christ wrote this will. There have been those who from that motive have made a very beneficent disposition of their property. Christ did not belong to that class. Neither was it done in the way of a grateful return to friends for their many kindnesses, though that is a very proper and considerate motive. Men of fortune when they make their wills do well to remember those who have been affectionate toward them, bearing with their weaknesses, advising them in their perplexities, helping them in their troubles. But it was not remembrance and regard for his friends that actuated Christ. No! God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, and so enemies, this will was drawn up in our favor.

"Oh, matchless kindness! and He shows
This matchless kindness to his foes."

This is something like love; love despised, rejected, spit upon, accused, buffeted, trampled under foot, and yet all the time busy in trying to benefit its enemies; love that looked down into the lowest hell of transgression and said, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners;" love that smiled through the midnight of Calvary's rage, and instead of hurling thunderbolts upon mocking scribes and hooting rabble and savage soldiers, just prayed back to heaven, "Father, forgive these also." When I want to know what love is, I will just read over this will that Christ made, and remember in whose favor he made it, and under what circumstances, and so get some idea of what love can do.

"Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break,
And all harmonious human tongues
Their Saviour's praises speak."

Certain formalities are used in drawing up a will. It must be expressed in proper phrase. It must be acknowledged as one's free will and testament. It must be signed and sealed in the presence of witnesses, who affix their own signatures. This is imperative in the eye of the law, however small the property may be.

You may be very sure all proper formalities were observed in drawing up the mightiest will ever made in the universe. Men criticize it sometimes as lacking unity. It is a mere series of memoranda, they say, fragments and snatches of history and conversation, not a proper document at all. Amazing mistake! All the lawyers of the world would have failed to draw it up so that it would have been as binding as it is now. The great problem of spiritual jurisprudence has always been how God could be just and yet justify a sinner, a problem never solved except under the provisions of this will.

The proper formalities not observed? What formalities were ever so august? This will was written in the Testator's blood. No ink was pure enough or permanent enough. The pen with which Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation that gave to millions their inheritance of freedom was only a common pen, but the pen that wrote this will and testament of Jesus Christ was a Roman spear, its point thrust into the Saviour's side to find ink for the writing.

The will was witnessed. Two worlds were summoned to hear the Testator cry, "It is finished," and see him affix the signature of his

death. The living came from their homes and the dead rose up out of their graves to witness the signing. The seal was affixed, the seal whose device is a blood-stained cross and an empty sepulcher. And over against that seal two worlds wrote their autograph: this world with the shaking hand of the earthquake; that world with the blazing penmanship of the lightning. And that will God the Holy Ghost, the appointed executor, comes and presents to men. Certainly, though not written out in law phrase, no other document was ever set forth in such august manner and with such solemnities of form. No other ever had such claims to the reverence and the ready acceptance of men.

And yet it is a contested will. The single condition on which men inherit under it is objectionable to many, and to get rid of that they cry out against the will itself with all its gracious provisions. The Testator has written down that the favor of God and eternal life can only be obtained through him. If we have them we must have them as a gift from him. We do not deserve them; we can not earn them. If our sins are ever forgiven they must be forgiven through Christ's blood. If we ever reach heaven it must be by the road which

he opened with his cross. No hand but his pierced hand can put into our hands the title-deeds of an estate on high; and so we are told that we must abate our pride and crush down our self-conceit, and come to him, and through faith in him learn to say, "Our Father," and so be adopted as sons and daughters into God's family, claiming every thing on the ground of the will. And men not liking to do that try to break the will and have it set aside and the property divided on some other terms, and so from the beginning until now the case has always been on trial in the court of human opinion.

Men ask that this will be set aside, in the first place, on the ground that it is not a genuine will. In our day especially it is argued that the Bible is in no special sense the Word of God. It has great thoughts in it and teaches us good morality, but it is not infallible. It is not binding upon us. We are not compelled to accept its statements. You hear plenty of that sort of talk. This book, so far as it claims to be divine, is a fraud. Infidel philosophers labor to disprove it. Liberal Christianity tries to sponge out all the blood letters of redemption. The advanced thought of the age ridicules it. Some of you, I am afraid,

do not believe it. It is laughed at as an exploded falsehood. Men drag it into the courts of criticism, and argue that God could n't have written it; that he would n't say such a thing as this, and it is absurd to suppose that he has any such purpose as that clause indicates. Some people call it a collection of traditions, others a bundle of myths, others an Oriental poem, others a system of theology. You may call it any thing you please, so long as you admit that it is not the Word of God. What infinite pains men take in this matter! The chemist's crucible, and geologist's hammer, and naturalist's microscope, and anatomist's scalpel, and antiquarian's spade, and astronomer's telescope are all busy trying to prove that the will is not genuine. A strange infatuation! The heirs to a boundless estate hard at work to prove that the document which secures them in possession is a miserable forgery, and they take so little by their motion!

That devil's work has been going on for eighteen hundred years, and there are to-day more Bibles in the world, and more people that believe it to be the Word of God, and more souls that come into their inheritance under its provisions, than there ever were before. It can not be

laughed down, nor argued down, nor torn in pieces, nor wiped out. It is God's Word, written first of all on his own heart and then copied for us. He meant it to stand, and stand it will. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of this blessed will and testament can ever fail.

Men endeavor to break this will and have it set aside on the ground that there is another and better attested will in existence. From reason and nature it is said we can learn all that we need to know about God and duty and destiny. At any rate, the will of God as expressed in nature and reason seems to indicate that men are sure of the divine favor and eternal life without any conditions; the blessings of providence fall on all alike. Rain, sunshine, health, prosperity, do not seem to depend upon a man's creed; the infidel and Christian share alike in the constant flood of bounty, and so, it is argued, it will be always and in every thing. The God who gives will certainly forgive if forgiveness is necessary; the God who furnishes every man with this fair heritage of earth will furnish every man with the fairer heritage of heaven. Our own reason teaches us that as we read nature, and that is enough. Is it enough? It might be if we were not sinners. It was enough once. Before Adam sinned he

needed no Bible to tell him the way of salvation. His constant, unbarred communion with God was his heaven. But since man sinned has nature and reason been enough to account for the altar fires that blaze in one unbroken line of flame through all the centuries of history? Account for that wailing cry that has gone up from every generation, "What must we do to be saved?" a cry at which nature has shrunk into dumbness, unable to answer? Account for the dread of death which haunts men like the nightmare? Account for those questions and fears in your own hearts which neither summer suns nor winter snows, nor oceans nor mountains nor forests, seem to have power to answer or still?

No, the old will, if will you can call it, was not sufficient. Men did not know, could not find out certainly, how God felt, what he meant to do; and so another testament was made, this New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the latest will is the one that holds. If in any thing it conflicts with what has gone before, it sets it aside; that is law in God's jurisprudence as well as man's, and this New Testament is the final one. It is written in the body of the will, "If any man shall add to these sayings, God shall add to him the

plagues that are written herein, and if any man shall take away from these sayings, God shall take away his part out of the tree of life and out of the holy city." This is not waste-paper, this New Testament, made void by another will. This is the last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ, embodying all the promise of the former and adding to it. Men must be blind who prefer the uncertainty without it to the assurance they have under it. Blind or not it matters not, the will is in force. Without it you and I can claim nothing; under it all things are ours.

But men endeavor to break this will on another ground, its alleged unfairness. It is said that its conditions are unfair, its rewards and punishments disproportionate to the matters on which they depend. Is there any unfairness? Look at it as a matter of law. The learned judge the other day stated in his charge that "the right to dispose of one's own by will is most thoroughly established by the laws. It is a right growing out of property. The absolute control over the disposition of property is a right which belongs to every man of sound mind. In the exercise of it the testator may consult his caprices, his likes or dislikes. He may disinherit his children and kindred; he may

dispose of his property to promote charity at the ends of the earth." Shall man have that unquestioned right and God not have it? He himself asks the question, "May I not do what I will with mine own?" Forgiveness is his; shall we question his fairness if he makes conditions of forgiveness? Heaven is his; shall we question his fairness if he prescribes the terms on which it may become ours? Let it be remembered that we have no shadow of a claim. He might send us all orphaned and homeless into eternity and still the cry would go up day and night before his throne, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

Men talk as though they had a right to demand of God the things which they receive only through his infinite mercy. No; the only unfairness is one that makes in our favor. It is unfair that we should go up from these weak, sinful lives of ours and be received to the loving embrace of our Father, and have the best robes of heaven put upon us; and yet — oh, wonder of grace! — men may do that, are doing it every day, under this will. Blessed unfairness of God, who casts our sins behind his back and receives us graciously and loves us freely! Wonderful unfairness, so more

than fair to us that it will be our song and joy forever! Thief on the cross, what do you think about it? and denying Peter, and blaspheming Saul, and redeemed sinners out of every age and land that have entered into possession through the unfairness of God? And as I turn my ear upward to listen for the answer, I hear dropping down through the criticisms and reproaches of a sinful world, the response of the ransomed hosts: "Hallelujah, hallelujah, thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us with thy blood and made us kings and priests unto God." And though men complain, the everlasting response sings on, stately and sweet, and every accusation of earth is answered by the hallelujah of heaven; and with such witnesses and such evidence in its favor, the will can not be broken. There is not power enough in earth or hell to set it aside. The estate of those who have entered into glory can not be wrested from them. None shall pluck them out of the Father's hand.

Your future and mine, friends, depends upon our acceptance or rejection of that will. We are not made heirs without our consent. We must acknowledge the will and comply with its conditions or we can not inherit under it. It is not, as some would have us believe, a matter of indif-

ference how we stand affected towards this grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is not a question of creed. It is not a question of theology. It is a question of inheritance. Beggared to all the eternities, or rich and blessed forever, which shall we be? It depends upon whether we accept or reject the will. In heaven or hell, where shall our future estates be? It depends upon whether we accept or reject the will. Agree to it and put ourselves under its provisions, and we secure glory and honor and immortality; reject it or pay no attention to it, and when death comes we shall be stripped of the last dollar of our money and the last rag of our possessions, and having spent all how shall we face the mighty famine of eternal want? Dear friends, why should we contest this last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ? It was made in our favor. Why should we not put in our claims as heirs under it and enter into our great estates?

The day is coming when this contest will be ended. Pursued from court to court of human opinion through so many centuries, the case will be on trial for the last time. The accessories of the trial will be worthy of the dignity of the cause. The court will assemble in the mighty amphitheater

whose walls and roof are the heavens on fire and the elements melting with fervent heat. The great white throne will be built for the seat of the Judge; the Ancient of days will be ushered to the bench by an innumerable company of angels, their staves of office the all-conquering banners of God; the trumpet of the archangel will be the crier's voice proclaiming the court open. All nations will be assembled not as spectators but as parties to the case. The will will be produced, its handwriting of blood legible to every eye, the signatures of Testator and witnesses burning with a glory beyond the brightness of the sun. No cunning counsel will stand before the bar trying to make the wrong seem right. The right will need no counsel. The will itself will be its own argument. The case will be given to no jury. It is in the hands of the Supreme Court of the universe for decision. And it will be decided, and there its enemies who would not acknowledge the will shall go away into everlasting punishment and its friends and heirs into life eternal.

IV.

The Sons of God.

IV.

THE SONS OF GOD.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." — 1 JOHN 3: 2.

IT is very satisfactory to remember who wrote these words, and how safe it is to believe them. They relate to an important matter, and one in which we all are, or ought to be, interested. What is religion? what can it do for a man? and is it worth the having? are questions which the world is always asking and answering in a variety of ways. The most opposite opinions are held on the subject. Quite a large class in the community consider religion a mere superstition, the folly of weak minds, against whose essential doctrines the laws of nature utter an emphatic protest. Modern materialism dismisses the spiritual and the supernatural with a sneer, and counts the time spent in the study and teaching of Scripture truth as wasted. Men of another cast of mind regard religion as a code of laws for the

regulation of conduct, its truths not necessarily a revelation, but a set of principles slowly learned and always enlarging, — the conclusions of experience rather than a direct word of God, — its sole value the mistakes from which it saves us and the right ways of living into which it leads us; a rigid, hard, but healthy statute system of morality, but utterly without any warm pulse of personal divine life in it that makes it attractive. You find others, also, with whom it is a mere fanaticism, a vapory, unsubstantial sentimentalism, which excites in them a certain exhilaration of feeling, but which seems to have very little grip and power on practical life. They spend so much time and exhaust so much energy in trying to feel good that there is hardly any left for being good.

Besides these there is a numerous class of thinkers and believers to whom religion is something more and something very different; who formulate their convictions in churches and Christian institutions; who find in religion a life as well as a law; who speak of peculiarly precious assurances and experiences which they enjoy; to whom Christ's words are both a comfort and a constraint, and who insist that right believing is the

secret of right living. How are we to decide between these different theories? Whether religion is worth our having depends upon what religion is. A good definition would be a wonderful help. If we can have the whole thing clearly outlined before us, we shall be in a condition to make up our minds as to what we each one of us ought to be and do in the matter.

Now the apostle John was peculiarly qualified to speak with authority on the subject. He was naturally many sided, a combination of man's strength and woman's tenderness, quick to feel and as quick to weigh and measure the substance and quality of his feeling. He had special opportunities. The chosen, intimate, and constant companion of our Lord in his earthly ministry, he shared as no other did in the secrets of the Messiahship. He saw the sorrows of Gethsemane and the glories of the transfiguration, the midnight of the cross and the sunburst of the resurrection. If any body is able to tell us what the real heart and life of religion is it is this apostle. And that is just what he undertakes to do in these words of the text.

Mark also that he does not attempt a philosophical definition. He just opens his heart to

us and tells us what he has found religion to be, and what it has wrought in him, and what it is able to work in any man. His fervid speech sets forth what religion is or may be to the whole world. Let us sit down with him a little while and hear what he has to say to us.

I. And, to begin with, he *announces a great fact.* "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." That is the status of every truly religious man. The characterization is evidently not a mere rhetorical flourish. I turn back one verse in the chapter and read: "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God, and so we are." There is something very real about all this. A truly religious man is differently situated from other men. His relations to this world and the world to come and the God of both worlds is peculiar and significant. Somehow, by the working of spiritual powers unseen and immeasurable, he has been made a member of the great and blessed family in whose interest all things are ordered. For him the stars shine, and the winds sing, and the tides heave, and the flowers spice the air with sweetness; and the course of human history keeps on its majestic way, and earth is attentive and

heaven busy. There is no shift in the vast universe of God that is not directly or indirectly for his good. He stands at the focus towards which all the rays of blessing converge. "Very visionary all this," perhaps you say; very real, nevertheless. Tell me, if you can, how to state the exalted condition of a religious man in terms more positive and exhaustive than those which Scripture itself uses: "For all things are yours; for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

And the blessed fact is that every religious man knows that he stands just there and so. The truth is not written on his forehead, the glory of it does not always transfigure him so that other people see it, but he has the inward evidence. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Men are not left in ignorance of the wonderful change that has been wrought in them and for them. In weak hours, when heart and strength fail them, there is a sudden uplift and reinforcement as they remember that "God is the strength of their heart and their portion for ever." In solitary hours there is a sense of companionship as the old voice out of Galilee whispers in their ears, "Lo, I am with you alway." In prayer there come moments

of disclosure when every vail is withdrawn and the child feels that he is talking with his Father. You have here the secret of religious contentment which the world is always at a loss to discover. There are multitudes who can not see what there is enjoyable in a Christian life. Apparently it has many constraints and few privileges. Its assemblies for worship, its devotions, its hymns, its various forms of effort, all seem to lack the sparkle which gives zest and edge to pleasure. The consciousness of sonship underneath explains it all. "I must be," and am glad to be, "about my Father's business," is the measure to which the statelier courses of life are set. There is nothing that gives satisfaction like a great assurance at the center of our being.

The Hall of the Stalactites in the Mammoth Cave looks shadowy and grim by the light of the lamps which other men carry, but kindle your own torch and raise it above your head, and you find yourself the center of a rain of splendors that stream from crystal and spar. Religious life looked at from outside seems tame and unsatisfactory, but Christian experience *carries its own lamp*, this consciousness of sonship, and in the light of that what seems tame and unattractive to

the world is transfigured by the great and blessed certainty.

And is it not easy to see what dignity and worth this consciousness must inevitably give to life? There is a vast deal in our happenings and surroundings to dispirit us. We are low down in the world, perhaps. People about us make little account of us. To the most of them it would not matter a farthing whether we lived or died. Worse still, we are not true to our better selves. We do not realize our ideals. We go stumbling along, our lives full of sins and blunders, never just what we want to be and mean to be, sometimes losing by a single misstep what we have gained by months of effort; that is the average life, is it not? But supposing a man knows that in spite of it all *he is a son of God!* Weakness, defilement, dust, can not cover up that fact. What courage it gives to enterprise! How the bracing north wind of that thought blows away the fogs and clouds of dispiritment that settle upon the soul! King Alfred, a fugitive and dishonored, watches the fire and turns the spit in the cottage in the Highlands, feeding his heart with the thought that, notwithstanding his poor surroundings, he is the king; and plain John and Mary, and all the

great brotherhood and sisterhood of believers now, stay themselves up with the assurance that they are of the royal house of heaven, in exile now, perhaps from their own fault, but not disowned or discrowned. This mighty confidence in them and a great hope before them, can you not see how such an assurance as that gives wonderful inspiritment and vigor to life?

"Ye are the salt of the earth," Christ said to his disciples. It is a fact, though not always recognized, that Christian men and women keep up the courage of the world. If they were to lose heart, all heart would be lost; and their support, which nothing can shake, is the thought of whose and what they are; and their conviction, that he is able to keep them and theirs secure, in spite of all the bewilderment and obscurity of present experience. If religion had nothing better and nothing else to give us than this consciousness, that of itself would be worth more than any thing which the world has to offer.

II. But the apostle further notes that whatever religion may be to us and do for us now, *it is only the hint of what is to follow.* "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The future to all of us is a vast, unexplored region. In this day of

wonderful knowledge, when the remotest history is being transcribed from deciphered hieroglyphics, and sculptured slabs and tablets unburied from the sands that have hidden them for centuries; in this day when adventurous science is unriddling every secret of earth and sea and sky, prying with the microscope into the most remote recesses of nature, penetrating with the telescope the infinite distances of space, making all the silence of the universe articulate, there is one side on which ignorance is still ignorance, and investigation makes no foot of advance. The other life, so near, so sure, so soon to be the experience of each one of us, what have we learned — what can we learn about that? It is to-day, as ages ago, the great mystery that baffles the most enterprising search. Multitudes of our friends have found out, are finding out about it every day, but only by the incommunicable revelations of death. We bend over their still faces, but their lips do not move to instruct us concerning the infinite secret. We stand over their graves, but no voice comes up from the sod under which they sleep, to tell us what we so greatly long to know. Beyond the horizon line of this short earthly life

"Nor eye nor listening ear can aught discover."

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

Now it is the peculiar office of religion to render this uncertainty not altogether painful. To the devout man it is an uncertainty of expectation rather than of fear. We are confident that we are to be, and that we are to be something better than we now are. Every-where in the universe where life is in harmony with its environment there is constant progression. It is always "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." The conclusions from analogy are all in the line of confidence, but religion has something more than philosophy to give pith and substance to its expectations.

There are certain old and uncontradicted words from the lips of Him whom it loves and calls Master that have the ring of certainty to them. "Because I live, ye shall live also." "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you." These promises are not minute in their specifications. They do not outline the details of the life to come, but they do this unmistakably: they assert that there is such a life, and religion satisfies itself with the general assurance, even if it lacks the particular description. The great fact is all that a child of God needs to know; the special shades and outlines of

the fact are of secondary importance. It is the rare and choice prerogative of religion that it faces the vast, illimitable future without a fear.

I sat one day this summer on the very edge of the great cataract of Niagara. The green waters swirled and boiled and plunged with thunderous roar into the depths with a shock that set the earth a-tremble, and out of the abysses into which they leaped the mists steamed up in clouds that almost obscured the sun. We who watched the impetuous push of the current and the headlong leap of the tide were awestruck and almost afraid, but over yonder on the very edge of the abyss, atmosphered with the rainbow mist, almost touching with their wings the stupendous sweep of the waters, the swallows swam with easy wing, undismayed, and drinking refreshment from that which so amazed and overpowered us, the greater creatures of God. I know of no fitter emblem of Christian faith than that, friends.

What a tremendous thought eternity is! a life that runs on century after century, age after age, cycle after cycle, and yet no pause or end! What is it to be? What are we to be in it? Science is dazed, philosophy is confounded, intellect has no words in which to articulate the great

reality; and yet on the very edge of the rush of its mighty tides the faith of the humblest Christian poises itself with untroubled wing and finds refreshment in the infinite mystery. Tell us, you to whom the hereafter is a great Perhaps, you to whom the dying hour seems the saddest hour of life, tell us, is it worth any thing to have an unshaken confidence that all will be well with us yonder? There is such a thing not only possible but actual. Every testimony of a Christian lifetime, every utterance of a Christian death-bed attests it. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but every religious soul facing the great hereafter is able to look, undismayed, and say out of the depths of experience: —

"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I can not drift
Beyond His love and care.

And so beside the silent sea
I sit with muffled oar;
No harm to me can come from Him
On ocean or on shore."

III. And then to all this the apostle adds that *religion brings us great assurances.* "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that

when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." That settles our future state. Character is its own condition. It is not so much matter where we are as what we are. "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." This much is certain: wherever he is, the believer is to be like Christ. Sometimes when we think about it that seems impossible. How little like Christ the best of us are now! How many weaknesses of character there are in us! How many sins we commit! How little there is in us that reminds us of the perfectness of our Lord! But all the same there is the assurance, "When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

I recall a morning not long ago when I looked toward the eastern horizon, which I knew was buttressed with great stretches of mountains, and the sight caught nothing but soft, gray folds of fog. To the eye the earth was one wide area of flatness, but behind the concealing curtains of mist the peaks were piled on peaks in one vast range of ruggedness, and as the sun rose higher and higher and the clouds dispersed, one by one the uplift of the great summits came into view. The mist was a thing of the morning, the mountains were as old

as creation. In the case of all of us our aspirations are better than our accomplishments. It is slow work and hard work to build ourselves up into goodness. Always we seem to be a long way from the perfect pattern of life which our Lord gave us, and that we should ever match ourselves with him looks like an impossibility; but behind the obscurity of the believer's doubts and fears looms up the vast certainty, the unrevoked promise of God: "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

What of victory over self and sin we get now we get through our imperfect acquaintance with Christ; standing face to face with him and knowing him altogether, the influence and inspiration of his presence will work wonders. "We shall be like him" — what larger hope could men have? Like him in character, not a stain on the soul's whiteness; like him in purpose, not a trace of any thing mean or selfish in our plans and wishes; like him in the steady sweep of our life towards its infinite possibilities; like him immortal, with all eternity in which to use our unfettered powers. Could there be a grander outlook and expectation than that?

Take that assurance, friends, as an unfailing

inspiration. In weak hours, when the work of life seems too hard for you; in times of despondency, when you reckon up how little you have accomplished; in moments when the burden of your sinfulness presses hard upon you; in your Gethsemanes of sorrow, where there seems nothing to experience but the agony and bloody sweat; in every time of need, remember that "when he shall appear we shall be like him." The hour is coming when life will put on its royalty, and we may well be contented a little while in the shadows, when the perfect day is so soon to dawn.

And so, beloved, what better counsel can I give you than the earnest and affectionate request that you each one find out for yourselves what religion is and what it can do for you. If it is possible to be now a child of God and to live consciously watched over and led by his loving care, we each one of us need to be that. If it is possible to have our estimates so corrected and our vision so enlarged that we shall see that our present experience is only a hint of what is to come, its best things shadows in comparison with the larger blessedness we are yet to know, that certainly is an expectation well worth the having. And if, in the struggle after a higher and nobler character

which we are all making, or ought to make, we may be encouraged by the assurance that by-and-by our imperfectly done work will be finished by the hands of the Master himself, so that nothing will be lacking which our largest aspirations seek, then certainly that is an inspiration which none of us can afford to be without. And all these things are blessedly true: the life of God in the soul, the expectation of immortal growth, the assurance of the perfectness of the heavens. Make all these things yours, friends. Be and live as children of God, feed your souls on the thought of the better things coming, and wait without a doubt for that hour when He who is our life shall appear, and you "shall be like him, seeing him as he is."

V.

"Nothing but Leaves."

V.

"NOTHING BUT LEAVES."[1]

"And seeing a fig tree by the way side, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever. And immediately the fig tree withered away." —MATTHEW 21: 19.

A LEAF is one of the most beautiful and wonderful objects in nature. It fulfills the double mission of grace and use. Just what the lungs are to man and animals, that the leaves are to the trees and shrubs. Vegetable equally with animal life depends upon and progresses by processes of respiration. We loosen and fertilize the soil about the roots of the tree in order to push on its growth, yet with all our pains we do but a small part of the work. The silent leaves above us, opening a thousand mouths on every branch, are the great feeders of fertility. All the day long, under the quickening chemistry

[1] Preached on board the steamship William Penn; copied by Stephen Massett; publicly read by him on board the steamship China on her first voyage from San Francisco to Yokohama, Japan; then printed at the office of The China Mail, Hong Kong, and later published by the American Tract Society.

of light and heat, they eliminate and breathe in the healthy oxygen from the air, that vitalizes the sap and spreads beauty and strength to every fiber and cell, and all the night they breathe out the waste and refuse carbon. Tender and fragile as they are, veined more delicately than an infant's hand, seeming to cling so timidly to bough and twig, yet without them trunk and branch would wither and stand the dreary skeletons of the life that had perished. But over and above their purposes of use, what grace and goodliness they give to nature, what marvelous varieties of form and size and shade they exhibit! Look at them in spring-time, when they are coming out timidly one by one in that fresh, exquisite green attire, quickening the throbbings of every heart with their hints of life. Look at them in the thick-leaved splendor of June, when, massed and matted, they darken the ground with their cool and grateful shadow; or watch them in autumn, when frost and ripeness fire the trees, and they flame gorgeous illuminations to swell the splendor of the triumphal march of harvest; and in all their shifting phases alike they rejoice the eyes, and give warmth and color to the most unimpressive nature.

Yet the leaves of a tree once called forth the condemnation and the curse of Christ (Matt. 21: 19). Walking with his disciples, he saw at a distance a fig-tree. In tropical countries the broad and luxuriant foliage of this tree makes it a notable object in the landscape. Weary and faint they hastened towards it, and stood under its shade; beneath its spreading branches they found shelter from the burning heat. Had it been dry and leafless he would have passed it by; but standing there full clothed in the splendor of Syrian summer, every bough quick with life, the processes of growth pushing on, because of its very appearance and seeming perfectness he cursed it, so that presently it withered away. Because he found thereon "nothing but leaves!"

Men plant fruit-trees not for foliage, but for fruit. A leaf is not the last and highest result of growth, but only an intermediate product of the process, meant to be a help to the perfect consummation. It was food that Christ was seeking and not shade. It was high time that it should be found. The fig appears before the leaf. That such a tree should be barren at such a season was sure proof that it was a

failure, so far as the highest end of its existence was concerned; and so, though it stood out a thing of beauty, broad-branched, thick-leaved, still because it bore "nothing but leaves," Christ condemned it, that it might be a type and warning to generations to come that lack of fruit-bearing is a sin against God, however attractive or promising a profession and life may be.

And yet how many systems of faith and practice, accepted by multitudes and commended with unmeasured praise, after all bear "nothing but leaves." Every thoughtful man admits the legitimacy of this test of fruitfulness. He has no hope that a barren theory will win its way in the world. He hastens to show, when he urges his scheme upon you, what it has done and what it can do. We judge of systems as we do of seeds, which will give us the fullest ears and the most abundant harvests. But men often fail to discriminate clearly between leaf and fruit. It is contended sometimes by the advocates of an amended gospel and a liberal creed, that the forth-puttings of that system are its all-sufficient verification. We are pointed to the eloquent orators, the elegant scholars,

the graceful poets it produces. But eloquence and scholarship and poetry are "nothing but leaves." Holiness of heart is the true fruit of a real gospel; the clusters ripened by the grace of God hang higher than the growths of intellect.

We are pointed to the earnest sympathy with man fostered by this genial faith; to its varied philanthropic schemes for the betterment of the laboring classes, for the reclamation of the vicious, for the rescue of the down-trodden and oppressed; but all these things, worthy as they are, are in comparison "nothing but leaves." The ripe fruit of genuine spiritual faith is salvation — a power that not merely ministers to bodily necessities or constrains to outward proprieties of conduct, but a power that goes deeper and does more thorough work — that purifies and renovates and sanctifies the soul. All else but this is as nothing. To mature this royal harvest the counsels of eternity were set. For this prophet and apostle were anointed with chrism divine. For this Jesus wept and suffered and died. For this the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, came, and comes and strives. For this all powers of holy growth forever struggle; and

any system, however great its triumphs in other directions, that can not show regenerate souls as its fruits, let it boast as it may, its best results are "nothing but leaves."

It is with the single soul, however, that this truth has the most to do; it has an eminently practical bearing on the individual well-being. Let every man take such care of himself that he shall be genuinely fruitful, and it matters little about systems. And this is the great end of our creation. God has put you and me into this world, not to amass fortunes, not to win great names, not to live easily and pleasantly, with as little trouble as possible, but to glorify him; and "herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." And yet most men drive on as if the great object in life was to bear "nothing but leaves" —to enlarge one's social influence, to reach a higher social position, to multiply possessions. For things like these, nine tenths of human energy is expended. We are more anxious about the quantity than the quality of our growth; we forget the one set purpose of our life. There are but few who so seclude themselves from the thrill and stir of the great multitude,

that they hear with distinctness God's message to their souls. We live in a thronged and busy world; we breathe its feverish air; we catch the contagion of its enthusiasms and hopes. We look at its prizes through the bewildering glare of sense; we wish, not strangely, to be and do as other men, and so we forget that in spite of the clamor and roar that fill the spiritual ear, a voice is sounding all the day, "Son, daughter, go work in my vineyard." The great end of life is mistaken, the powers and possibilities given for holy and lasting use are employed in unworthy ways and for inferior ends, and we come to the end of our years, be they many or few, to find at the last and too late that all our toilsome probation has borne for us "nothing but leaves."

It is of the first importance, therefore, for the wise conduct of life, that a man should recognize his true mission as a fruit-bearer. It is essential to economical and successful labor that the task should be accurately defined. Half the work in the world is wasted because men strike at haphazard. They have no specific aim, only a vague and general desire to "get on." The great apostle gave the rule of success in

any direction when he said: "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one who beateth the air." Thrust a magnet into a heap of metallic particles and at once they assume set and crystalline forms. And distinctness of purpose has a magnetic power. It brings into proper position and play every force that can bear upon the end to be obtained. It utilizes latent energies, and originates combinations of powers, and works every thing at full pressure, and with all the might of an unconquerable will presses on to triumph.

Witness in proof of this the methods in which men of the world win their victories. Let a man make up his mind, like Girard, to be rich, and see how that determination works for him. Every thing else is held subordinate to that end. Body and soul become mere slaves to that overmastering purpose. Hunger presses him, but he will not yield to appetite any further than is needful to get strength to make money. Pleasure wooes him, but he turns away from all its enchantments; there is no money to be made by self-gratification. Taste urges its claim, but it can not be heeded, for it takes instead of makes money to satisfy it. He walks abroad, but it

is not to breathe the sweet air, nor gladden the eyes with the wonders of a world of beauty, but only to see where some new dollar may be found. Every thing he is or has or does strains toward the same end; and that passionate enthusiasm, laughing at obstacles, presses on till it grasps the prize for which it has dared and done all. There is no power like the might of a great determination. Nothing less than the divine can match it. When a thousand wires are welded into one, they forge the Damascus steel, that can divide the gossamer or cut the iron bar asunder; and when all the energies of a man are molten into one force by the potent heat of purpose, they shape a blade invincible by aught but the flashing sword of Almightiness.

Let a man then live, first and most of all, from the thought that his work in the world is to bring forth fruit to the honor and glory of God; that whatever else is left undone, *this must be done;* that however promising a project, it is to be rejected if it interferes with the sovereign purpose. Let a man live so, and spiritual success is sure. For whatever power determination has in other departments, it is intensified in this. By special aids God speeds the purpose of righteousness

to fulfillment. The best laid human schemes sometimes miscarry by reason of perils and hindrances that no man could foresee. But along the track we travel to do thy will, O God, there are no hidden reefs to wreck our ships, no billows to engulf them, no tempests to beat them back. The earnest soul journeys along a safe and sure highway, over which "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Mount Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads."

If you and I, then, are so conscious of our high vocation, and so faithful that we make this determination the supreme law of life, we may reasonably expect that our labor will ripen abundant fruit; not necessarily marvels of growth. It is a vice of human nature that it can not be satisfied unless it can do some wonderful thing. Every man sets out to be a great man, but very few get much farther than the start.

This spirit besets us from the earliest years. The child, poring over the wonderful romances that form the mental food of his first days, longs for the time when he shall go out to slay giants and capture castles. The youth looks contemptuously upon the routine of daily life

as too commonplace for his abilities; and as men get on to maturer years, do they quite forget to build castles in the clouds, whose splendor puts to shame the common walls in which they live and work? The desire is all well in its way, but the trouble is, it keeps us dreaming when we should be working, and too often makes us discontented and disheartened, forgetting that God gives to the seeds of faithful endeavor we sow such a body as pleases him, and to every seed his own body. So long as a man is true to the task which God sets him, let him learn, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content. I can not be the apostle Paul, but I will not worry about that; my sole concern is to ripen the best fruit I may where I am planted. And, moreover, marvels do not make up the bulk of life. The few prodigies of growth which the farmer brings to the agricultural fair are exceptions, not specimens of his harvest. His barns and cellars are filled with something quite different from what is contained in the single basket. The most of both nature and life is made up of what we call commonalties. God never meant that men should be all the time doing wonderful things; if they did, they would cease

to be wonderful. We esteem them marvelous simply because they are infrequent; and if you come to the real truth of the matter, those relative epithets, great and small, as we use them, amount to almost nothing. If an apple grows till it measures a foot, we call it a prodigy; but it is not near so much of a prodigy as that the smallest apple should grow at all. The process itself, and not its extent, is the real wonder. The evening prayer lisped by the child is just as really, just as worthily, just as acceptably praise as the triumphant strain from the harp-strings of the seraphim. Your victory over some common temptation is just as wonderful as the rout of the rebellious hosts of heaven. The Christian graces that ripen in your humble life are as great a marvel, and glow as brightly in the sight of God, as the twelve manner of fruits that hang on the tree planted by the crystal river of Paradise. And just this kind of fruit men in every station may bring forth every day.

But my lot in life, you say, is so humble, and my experience has so little that is noteworthy, what can I do? "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink," says the apostle, "or whatsoever ye do,

do all to the glory of God." Let a man thank God that he can glorify him in common things. Nor let him forget that in modest walks and unobtrusive ways he may chance to make the most acceptable offering. When God paints a flaunting lily, he dashes on the rawest of colors; but the little violet is tinted with heaven's own hue. The Alpine strawberry, no larger than a pea, is sweetest of all the fruits of the field. Nature compacts her choicest flavors and colors, and seals them up in the smallest of flasks, and the man who pierces down to the lowest stratum of life, and sanctifies the common word and act, evidences thereby a richer and fuller grace than he who stands up in the pulpit to preach, or sets himself sword in hand at the head of the hosts of some great reform.

As a general rule, rich and rare fruits are ripened slowly. Some of the most eminent forth-puttings of pious growth have been long in maturing. Men have spent years in pushing on silent but patient processes: and because there was no speedy result adequate to the labor, the world said: "Lo, these are barren trees; they bear nothing but leaves." Yet just as the unsightly cactus bequeathed from father

to son, wearing away the life-time of three generations without hint of beauty or use, at last, when the full century is rounded, flowers out into one full, consummate blossom, filled with the juices of a hundred years, so at length the fruit of these earnest workers appears. For thirty years Jesus was as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, till the royal hour of his ripeness struck; and then what age was ever so magnificently blossomed as the brief years of his ministry? What other era of time has borne such fruits as Gethsemane and Calvary? It matters not though men call our lives barren, if with faithful and unwearying culture we are carrying out the plans of the great Husbandman. When God pleases, the harvest long ripening will appear all the more impressive from the unsuspected quiet out of which it has grown.

Almost every life has its crises and turning-points of greater or less magnitude. There are single hours and acts that, like rudders, steer us into wide seas of triumph or misfortune. In their significance and influence they stand solemn and apart from the rest of life. But there is no other so wonderful epoch in a man's history as the time when, after years of barrenness, or

at best "nothing but leaves," he becomes at last genuinely fruitful. You have read that thrilling story of the broken cable stretched along the ocean's bed for more than a thousand miles; how "night and day for a whole year the electrician had been watching its tiny signal ray; how sometimes wild, incoherent messages came from the deep, spelt out by magnetic storms and earth currents, till of a sudden, on a morning, the unsteady flickering changed to coherency; and after the long interval that had brought nothing but the moody and delirious mutterings of the sea, stammering over its alphabet in vain, the cable began to speak, and to transmit the appointed signals which indicated human purpose and method at the other end, instead of the hurried signs, broken speech, and inarticulate cries of the illiterate Atlantic." But that is a more wonderful hour when over the living wires of the soul, long speaking in stammering and incoherent phrase, as the earth currents and the storms of sense and sin have uttered themselves, there comes at length the unmistakable pulse of thought and feeling from the infinite wisdom, and God begins to speak through that soul to men by the signals of holy

words and works. The thrill and ecstasy of that hour will never be lost. It will be the bright, consummate center of life, for not two continents but two worlds are then wedded into one.

How is it with you, my brother? Does Christ, when he comes to you, as he comes daily, find a fruitful life, or "nothing but leaves"? Give heed to the lessons of every autumn hour, that leaves, however fair, soon fall and perish, while the fruit is gathered into garners. What provision are you making for the coming time, when the summer shall be past and the frosts of winter fall? Let you and me strive for lives rich in lasting results, and whatever of help and success we may seek for the furtherance of our cherished plans, still let our supreme prayer be: —

> "Something, my God, for thee,
> Something for thee!
> That each day's setting sun may bring
> Some penitential offering;
> In thy dear name some kindness done,
> To thy dear love some wanderer won—
> Some trial meekly borne,
> Dear Lord, for thee!"

VI.

What shall this Child be?

VI.

WHAT SHALL THIS CHILD BE?

"And all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa. And all that heard them, laid them up in their heart, saying, What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him." — LUKE 1: 65, 66.

THIS is a part of the story which is told in the New Testament about a boy named John. His father, whose name was Zacharias, was a minister, and one day while he was conducting the service in the church, some time before John was born, he found all of a sudden that he had lost his voice. The congregation did not know what to make of it; only a few minutes before they had heard him talking, and now he stood up in the pulpit, saying nothing and making signs with his fingers, which of course they did not understand. He was no better the next day, nor the next, and so several weeks went on, and Zacharias had to make his way round among his friends trying the best he could to talk to them with his fingers. The day John was born there was a good deal of talk in the family as to what the new boy should

be called. You know how it is at such times, how much talk there is. After they had discussed the matter about a week, the friends said, "He ought to be named Zacharias, after his father." But his mother said, "No, I am going to call him John." "John!" the friends said, "what makes you call him John? None of your relatives were called John. Father, grandfather, great-grandfather, uncles, cousins, there is not a John among them all." But the mother would not change her mind, so they tried to make the father understand that they wanted to know what he thought about it. Zacharias could not talk out a name on his fingers, so he got a piece of smooth white sheepskin and a pen and wrote down, "His name is John." Just as soon as he had written that, his speech all came back to him, and he could talk as well as ever, and the first thing he did with his new voice was to thank God; and so after all the dispute, it was settled in this strange way that the boy should be called John, a name which means "the gift of God."

It was not any thing strange, then, that people should be curious to know how that boy was going to turn out. So many wonderful things had happened the first week of his life that they were

quite certain that he would not grow up to be a common man. All the friends and relations and neighbors used to talk about it, and they talked so much that the story got out, and all through that part of the country men and women and children heard about the remarkable baby in that town among the hills; and instead of asking about the color of his eyes, and how much he weighed, and that sort of questions which we sometimes hear in these days, the question which every body asked was this: "What then shall this child be?" They wanted to look ahead a good many years. They wished they knew what sort of a boy at school John would be, and what kind of a young man, and what he would do when he set up in life for himself. Of course about a great many things they could only guess, but there was one thing which they were all sure of, that he would be something remarkable, "for the hand of the Lord was with him."

Now just that question which those people in far-away Judæa eighteen hundred years ago asked about baby John, serious men and women in our times feel like asking about every boy and girl they know, "What then shall this child be?" Do you wonder why they are curious

about that? It is because they know to what great things every child may grow. You go out some bright autumn day into the woods, and sit down under a tree and begin to play with the smooth acorns that lie thick upon the grass. How small and light they are; you can hold a half-dozen of them in your hand. You snap them at each other as if they were marbles, and laugh when you make a good shot. Now get up and look at the tree. Put your arms round the trunk; oh, but it is too large, you can not reach. See those great limbs overhead; any one of them is stout enough to bear your weight. Then try to count the hundreds of branches and the thousands of leaves that are swinging and dancing in the sun. What a monster of a tree! Yes; but there is one just like it in every one of those acorns you are tossing about; a great oak-tree is nothing but an acorn grown up. You say, What a difference between the tree and the acorn! But there is more difference between the little child, helpless in its mother's arms, and the grown-up man, who is not only bigger in body, but bigger in mind, and has got to be a famous general, or President, or distinguished scholar, and can manage armies or govern a nation. Every boy here this morning has in him the

makings of a good man, and if he is only managed right and manages himself right, before many years he will be making his mark in the world. Every girl here this morning has in her the beginnings of a sweet Christian woman, and if she is taken care of, and takes care of herself, before long will be looked up to and respected and loved. When every child has the chance of being so much, it is no wonder that when we look into the face of a boy or girl, we feel like asking the question, "What then shall this child be?"

There is one great trouble about answering that question. You can not by just looking at a child even guess how the child will turn out. If I look at an acorn, I know just what will happen if I plant it. I can tell beforehand what sort of a tree will come up, what the shape and color of the leaves will be, what rough brown bark it will have, but when I look into these bright young faces, how can I or any body tell just what these children will be by-and-by? I can not point to one boy and say he will be a successful merchant, and to another and say he will be governor of the state; or to these girls, and say this one will be a teacher, and that one will paint beautiful pictures, and so on through the whole list. Nobody but

God can tell about those things. Some of those children may, I hope all of them will, grow up to be the joy and pride of their parents and a blessing to the world; and some of them may, but God forbid that any of them should, grow up to be a sorrow to father and mother and a curse to society. But who knows any thing about it, as they sit together here this morning, smiling and happy?

Sometimes when I look at a company of young people, I feel as I do when I see the postman carrying round the mail. Do you ever watch him and think what different messages he is bringing to different people? He has a bundle of letters in his hand, and they look very much alike. Most of them have smooth white envelopes with a little green stamp in one corner, and you can hardly tell one from another by seeing the outside. But what a difference there is in the inside! He leaves a letter at one house, and the mother opens it and reads that the girl who has been away at school is coming home to-morrow, and how glad all the children are when they hear it. He leaves another letter that looks just like it at the next house, and the father opens it and reads that the boy who went away to sea last year has died of fever on the African coast far away from his

friends, and how all the family mourn and weep! He drops a letter at some business man's office, and he opens it and reads that some investment has turned out well and he is a great many thousand dollars richer; and the letter he leaves for the next man tells him that he has lost all his property and must begin life over again. What different messages to different people in those white envelopes that look so much alike, news of deaths and births, of marriages and funerals, of good and bad fortune, of joy and sorrow! But who can tell which is which, or what is in any of them by just seeing the outside of these letters? It is precisely so with a company of children: each one of them has some sort of message to the world. The things they are going to do, the lives they are going to live, the men and women they are going to be, what an influence that will have! how many hearts they will make glad or sad! But who can tell which will be which, and pick out the boys and girls that will be useful men and women, and the others who will do no good while they live, and the world will be glad to have dead and out of the way? Nobody can tell. These children in their fresh young life are like letters in the envelopes. The message

they are to bring the world is inside, and we can not read the writing. Nobody but God knows just what and how much their lives are to mean.

It would be a grand thing, then, would it not, if there were some way in which young people could make it certain that they would be nothing but good and do nothing but good as long as they lived, and so could look forward to all the years to come and be sure that they would be years of happiness and usefulness? Well, the blessed truth about the matter is that we can know all that we really need to know. God has not told us, and so nobody can tell us beforehand just what sort of houses we are going to live in or what kind of business we are going to follow; whether we are to be carpenters, or machinists, or railroad men, or merchants, or housekeepers, or school-teachers; whether we shall have a great deal of money or very little; but God has told us, and so every body ought to know, how to increase in gentleness and goodness and influence every year, and reach the home in heaven at last. It is a good deal with our lives as it is with sailing in ships. A man who is going from this country to England does not know

which way the wind will blow every day of the voyage; or whether the sea will be rough or smooth; but he has got a chart and a compass, and he does know that if the vessel is steered in the right direction, and the engine keeps thundering away in the hold, and the screw propeller is all the time turning round and round, and the sailors are on the lookout for danger, he will make a good passage and in due time step on shore at Liverpool, which is the thing he most wants to know and do. God does not tell every thing which will happen to us, but he does tell us how we, every one of us, can make our lives beautiful and blessed, so that our friends will be proud of us and people will be glad that they know us, and, best of all, God will be satisfied with us and say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servants."

And now I suppose you will ask, at least I certainly hope you will ask, "What is this way, God's good and true way of living?" How can I, Charles, Richard, Thomas, James, Harry, be such a boy and become such a man that I shall be glad and every body else will be glad that I am in this beautiful world? How can I, Mary, Nellie, Lizzie, Carrie, Edith, be such a girl and become such a woman that I shall be a light in the home,

an ornament to society, and loved every-where and always? Well, to answer that question, we shall have to go back to the story of baby John. We read in the New Testament how he grew up to be a famous man, and multitudes crowded to hear him tell about the coming Redeemer, and our Saviour said of him, "Among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John." And the reason for it all is given in those last words of our text, which I hope every child will commit to memory and never forget; those simple but very blessed words, "For the hand of the Lord was with him."

"For the hand of the Lord was with him." What do those words mean? Two things in particular. First of all, they mean that God was all the time showing John what to do and how to live. The boy had a good father and mother who taught him what was right, and he had the Old Testament which he used to study, and the church to which he went on the Sabbath, and as he paid attention to what he learned he was not very likely to go wrong. But besides that, God used to teach him by his Spirit. He helped him to understand things so that he should not make mistakes, and he stirred up his conscience so that

he was unwilling to do what was not right, and so though John could not see God, nor hear him speak, yet he felt sure that it was God who was leading him, and every one of us may have the hand of the Lord with us in just the same way. We have the Old Testament and the New besides, the whole Bible, in which we find written down the rules which direct all right living, and we have the church and the Sabbath-school, and many of us have good instruction at home. So far as these things go we are quite as well off as John, and then, too, God comes to us in just the same way he did to him, and makes us understand and feel and see, so that we have no excuse for going wrong. It was wonderfully good in God to give us the Bible and Church and Sabbath-school, but do you ever think how much more it means that he should come to us every day by his Spirit, and make dark things plain, so that when we find it hard to make up our minds he makes them up for us and we become sure of what we ought to do?

Perhaps you have been out driving sometimes in a part of the country where you had never been before, and you got to a place where three or four roads all came together and you did not know which you ought to take.

While you were wondering you saw a tall post, and on the post a flat board, and on the board a hand was painted, and some words, so that you read, Danvers so many miles, and Springfield so many, and Salem so many. Well, that was a good thing, and as you drove along the strange road you said: "I don't know whether this is the right way, but anyhow the hand of the guide-board is with me." And then a little further on you came to a house and saw a man sitting on the steps, and if you did as I often do up in New Hampshire, you stopped and asked him to tell you the way to the place which you wanted to reach; and the man came out and pointed with his hand and said, "Keep straight on." You were perfectly sure then, and when you got into a bit of woods where you could see only a little way ahead, you were not at all troubled, but you said: "I know I am going right, for the hand of the man is with me, and he knows all about it." How thoughtful and tender in God to do just that for you and me, and when the Bible is not quite plain to us, and we don't quite understand what we heard in the church, to have him whisper in our minds and hearts, "This is the way." How certain we are to go right when the hand of the Lord is with us.

And these words mean one thing more, that God not only tells us what to do, but he helps us to do it. Never forget that God is always with you. He looked after John, and when he saw he was in trouble he assisted him, made him stronger and persevering, or reminded him of some promise that put new life into him. If we only let him, he does that thing for us all the time. I specially want these young people to believe and remember that we are never in any difficulty that God is not near enough and willing to help us out. We forget him very often, but he never forgets. Whether we are asleep or awake, at home or abroad, reading, studying, walking, playing, working, wherever we are, he is close to us. He hears us every time we ask him to assist us, and he always answers, and if the hand of the Lord is with us we need not be afraid. Nothing can harm us or keep us from going straight on. We can do all things with his help, and trusting in him our lives will be safe and grow beautiful; we shall get the better of one evil thing after another, and when we are all through with the world it will be found, as the apostle Paul has told us, that we have come off "conquerors and more than conquerors through him that loved us."

I have hosts of good wishes in my heart for all the young people here to-day: that if God wills they may have long and happy lives; that they may be spared from sickness and sorrow and suffering; that they may never know poverty and want; but no wish of all is so strong as the wish that it may be truly said of them, as it was of John, that "the hand of the Lord is with them." And when you look back in future years to this bright June day, I hope it will be best remembered, not for the flowers with which your friends have made the place beautiful for you, for flowers will fade, nor even for the kind words which are said to you, for the voices that speak them may be silent then; but I hope it will be remembered as the day when each for himself and herself decided to try and live a true, earnest Christian life, with God for a friend and leader and helper, to obey him the greatest pleasure, and so when the divine favor was secured and peaceful days on earth made certain, and after them the joys of heaven forever.

VII.

Beloved for the Fathers' Sake.

VII.

BELOVED FOR THE FATHERS' SAKE.

"*They are beloved for the fathers' sake.*" — ROMANS 11: 28.

THERE is something very wonderful and pathetic about the affection of God for the ancient people of Israel. They were selected at first from among the nations of the earth to serve as the channel through which the divine will and grace might be made known to men. It pleased God for reasons known to himself, which were undoubtedly good reasons, to undertake the religious education of a race by a peculiar method. Certain simple truths, which could be easily apprehended, he taught universally by a series of object-lessons. He made the framework of physical nature suggestive and articulate of his power and wisdom and government, so that the heavens arching over all lands should declare the glory of God, and the blue scroll of the firmament should everywhere show his handiwork. He puts into the orderly succession of times and seasons a spirit-

ual significance, so that day unto day should utter speech of him, and night unto night show knowledge. He put also into the human constitution the faculty of conscience, the sense of right and wrong, and the feeling of praise and blame, and so all men had and always have had the germs at least of the three great ideas of God, righteousness, and responsibility.

But that knowledge was at best only alphabetic and quite insufficient. In endeavoring to combine those ideas, and out of their relations to educe the laws of right living, all history shows that men have blundered, and tangled themselves in a snarl of contradictions and confusion, so that their knowledge has been a curse rather than a blessing. Larger light was needed, more detailed and minute instruction, positive laws and institutions, moral problems actually worked out in human experience to serve as examples and illustrations of how the thing was to be done. So God chose out one nation to be the world's school-master; walled it in by severe restrictions of non-intercourse with other nations, that it might have leisure and space for the peculiar instruction it was to receive; kept constantly before it the idea that the spiritual uses and possibilities of

life were of principal importance; gave it special and increasing revelations as the people grew able to comprehend them, and then gave the nation such an emphatic position that all the world could see and judge of the results of that unique course of training. To compare things human and divine, just as the inventor of some wonderful and complicated piece of mechanism that is destined to effect large changes in industrial enterprise first makes a working model and puts it on exhibition that men may see for themselves its practical utility, so God made the Jewish nation a pattern of what could be acquired and effected by a knowledge and observance of his laws. It had a still higher function to discharge. The Israelitish people were God's normal pupils, trained to be teachers, divinely instructed in both matter and methods, and sent out for the enlightenment and salvation of the world.

By virtue of their occupancy of that office the Jews were especially dear to God. Standing as they did, the medium of communication between him and an ignorant and lost world, he was eager to instruct and save them; they had peculiar claims upon his affection. When we remember

their significant position, it seems nothing wonderful that he should have been so constant and painstaking in his care; that he should rain down bread from heaven for their hunger, and cleave the rocks into water-springs when they were thirsty; that he should march before them in the changing pomp of cloud by day and fire by night; that he should kindle the glory of his visible presence in tabernacle and temple; that he should swing the sword of his almightiness over the battle-field where they fought with their enemies; that he should lead them into the possession of the vineyards and harvest-fields of Canaan. They were his elect people, carrying out his purposes, sometimes blindly, often in a blundering fashion, not infrequently reluctantly, but still in the main doing it. They sinned, but they repented; they turned back, but they rallied and went on again, slowly clearing their way wedgewise into the gnarled mass of brutality and unrighteousness that oppressed the earth and defied heaven. God loved them for what they were attempting and in part accomplishing. It was his work, and the workers were precious in his sight.

But more than this, among the many there

were some who were eminently worthy of being loved for their own sakes. What grand patterns of humanity shine like stars all along the line of Old Testament history: Abraham, so loyal to God; Joseph, so illustrious in faith; Moses, so obedient; Joshua, so valiant; kings and common men so devout; prophets so impassioned and bold. How long and how splendid the roll of ancient worthies! And if there is any thing which God loves it is good and true men. In poor human fashion they are reproductions of his own divine righteousness, photographs, dim and blurred perhaps, of himself, but not so blurred and dim but that the likeness is traceable. Men after God's own heart; how inexpressibly dear they are to him! He never forsakes them or forgets them. Earthly experiences are shaped with reference to their well-being, all things work together for their good, "and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels."

But this love of God for Israel had a still wider range. They were a people that greatly tried his patience all along the line of their history, and there came a time at last when they openly took issue with him. Their peculiar office

as a people was at an end when Jesus Christ appeared. Ritual and sacrifice, on which they laid so much stress, all foreshadowed and reached forward toward him, and when he came, the world's Redeemer, the special sanctity of Judaism passed away, and the wide gospel was offered to the wide earth. That last and crowning revelation the Jews rejected. They were very bitter against the Lord's Christ, although he was the end of their law to salvation, the royal and resplendent blossom for whose blooming the spiritual forces of thousands of years had been working. You know the story of their spite and persecution, intensifying through all the period of the Redeemer's ministry, until it culminated at last in his crucifixion at their hands. It was a hatred that outlasted his death and showed itself in their rage against his disciples and in their savage attempts to crush out the early Christian Church. It would have seemed nothing strange if God had resented such an interference with his plans, and had cast the frown of his wrathful face upon them and given them over to swift destruction. But how differently he dealt with them! On the very eve of his death Jesus stands over against the city and

cries: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not." On the Mount of Ascension Christ gives as his last commission, "Go, teach all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The inspired apostle declares: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that it may be saved." The Epistles are full of the divine yearnings over the rebellious people. So far as the record shows, God's love for them, instead of waning, grew in the same ratio in which they forfeited all right to it by their stubbornness and sin.

The writer to the Romans comes forward with an explanation of this wonderful fact. He makes no attempt to slur over their sin, or to apologize for it; he freely admits that as touching this gracious gospel, they are enemies, their faces set as a flint against it; but for all that they are not cast off, and scorned, and trampled under foot, but they are still "beloved for the fathers' sake." God remembers Abraham and Moses, and Joshua and David, and all the mighty ancestry of this rebellious people, and for the sake of those who served him so gloriously, he keeps in his heart an affection for their recreant children. "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine

elect," he says, "I have even called thee by thy name, though thou hast not known me." It was a wonderful thing for those proud and defiant sinners that they came from such pious stock. That fact moved God to forbearance, and because of it he rained blessing upon them in spite of their unworthiness.

"Beloved for the fathers' sake." The Jews did not have the exclusive property right in that gracious condescension of God. It still exists and is still operative. It evidences its reality in a variety of ways. How many men and women here to-day who are living Christian lives owe their faith and hope largely to pious parents. It was not inherited, but God loved those fathers and mothers of yours, and he knew the yearnings of their hearts for your salvation, and so he surrounded you with all gracious influences, and was not discouraged by many failures, and multiplied inducements and persuasions and warnings and counsels, until you were led to accept Christ as your Redeemer and Lord. It is altogether probable, too, that some here to-day who have no interest in religion, but are in fair repute in the world and blessed with earthly prosperity, owe the mercies they so unworthily enjoy to God's

esteem for their holy parentage. "The Lord blessed the house of Pharaoh for his servant Joseph's sake," and the relation between father and child is closer than that of master and servant. These religious homes from which so many of us came out, who can tell how far the gracious shadow of the roof-tree extends? Scholars attempt with some measure of success to unriddle the workings of the law of heredity, but no science can explain the subtler, diviner fact that God finds in the faith and righteousness of the parent the occasion and reason for the tender consideration of the child. This only we know, but this certainly we know, that it is a wonderful blessing to have had a pious ancestry, for in some strange but very real way the children are "beloved for the fathers' sake."

It is quite evident, then, that this fact lays a new burden of responsibility upon those who are parents. It is the characteristic of well-ordered household life that the elder serve the younger. Take any home that deserves the name and it is wonderful to see how largely the plans are made and the domestic wheels move with reference to the welfare of the children. It is the most natural thing in the world. Leaving out

of account the peculiar and imperative impulse of parental affection, how much it means to have absolute control of the training of a child. What infinite possibilities are waiting to be developed, what plastic material to be handled and shaped, capable of being fashioned into the splendor of an angel or the ugliness of a fiend. Men are not omnipotent, but they are never so near it as in the matter of bringing up the young committed to their care. Every generation is in a large sense responsible for the future of human history. With proper management, how irresistible home influence is! How the theories of father and mother, their habits of thought, ways of life, affections and antipathies, narrowness or breadth, ambitions and estimates, as a rule, are handed on, and re-appear in the younger members of the household. The seeming exceptions to this rule are largely due to faulty or careless methods of education. And whoever considers what a man may be, both on the heaven side and the hell side of his nature, and realizes that in the training of his child the making of a man is almost absolutely in his hands, may well devote to that object the best of his energies and the bulk of his time. When we remember how much is

involved, it is nothing strange that parents plan and labor and endure and sacrifice, to secure for their sons and daughters reputable and influential positions in life.

And certainly if that purpose is commendable, it is eminently wise in parents to secure the best things for their children. There are some hard-gotten inheritances that are of questionable value. It is not entirely sure that to leave a large estate is to transmit a positive blessing. In all our cities and towns are idle and shiftless men and women, made shiftless and idle by inherited wealth. They are of no use in the community. They loiter and dawdle and saunter and simper through life, as though the universe were administered in their private interest. They are too lazy to work, too imbecile to have strong convictions, too selfish to be sympathetic, too enamored of their own little, shriveled, pampered, inconsiderable personality to be aware that there is any body else of importance in the world. Their idea of life is a succession of pleasures and frivolities, to be in the fashion and to kill time, and they look for a heaven of well-furnished parlors and full-dress receptions. To bring up children to play that part in society

is to entail misery upon them and inflict a curse upon the world.

So of some other things of which we commonly make great account, social position, a famous family name, political influence; these things, however good in themselves, have their limitations and their evil possibilities. There is only one thing which a man can transmit to his children, which is absolutely without flaw and potent for nothing but good, and that is the memory of a devout and righteous life. "I leave," said Patrick Henry in his will, "I leave to my children the Christian religion. With it they are rich, if they do not own a dollar; without it they are poor, though they possess millions." And there is no so sure way in which a man can transmit that inheritance as by living a Christian life himself. The recollection of it in the years after he is gone is a will written in unfading ink, with no technicalities over which lawyers can quarrel and set aside the intention of the testator. The memories of a religious home, who can ever shake himself quite free from their restraining and gracious influence? Men who have removed their residence from the Atlantic coast to the West have told us how often in

the night time, when the winds were high, they have seemed to hear rising above the rustle of the prairie grasses, or the roar of the tossing branches, the deep, solemn boom of the sea breaking upon the shore; for the music of the surges once heard can never more be utterly silenced, but every now and then mingles its majestic chords with the strains and sounds of our many voiced life. The recollections of a religious home, how permanent they are, how stored with power! They come to men in great crises of life, and make them stalwart when they were on the point of giving up the hard fight with evil. The calm faces of a devout father and mother flash before them in some time of mental bewilderment, when they are just ready to pronounce religion a lie and God himself a superstition, and faith recovers its poise and steadies itself, and always the charmed atmosphere of the remembered home-life is about them, even in their farthest wanderings and deepest degradation, making it hard for them to get utterly beyond hope. Let men bless God that he has given such sweep of influence to simple Christian living, and specially let every parent see to it that he and she live those simple

Christian lives, that when they are laid away in silence, and can speak no audible word of counsel or persuasion through the impenetrable wall of death, they may still admonish and restrain and encourage their children, by the remembrance they have left them of a devout faith and conversation.

And this is not all. The parent who himself leads a Christian life, thereby brings his children into the covenant company of those who are "beloved for the fathers' sake." I say covenant company. This is no trick of words or pleasant superstition. The promise was made long ago to pious Abraham: "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee," and the promise has never been abrogated. "Leave thy fatherless children," God said to the holy prophet, "and I will preserve them alive." This is not cant or fanaticism, but a blessed reality. There is nothing strange about it either. If you are true man or woman you have a tenderness for all little ones, but you have a warmer interest in the children of your intimate friend than in those of a stranger. And how much it means that while the world's great army of children are watched over and cared for by God, there are some who are spe-

cially "beloved for the fathers' sake." How often it has brought comfort to a dying mother to hand over her child to some true and tried friend, who has promised to take it and train it as her own. But what infinitely greater comfort, possible to every one of us, to so live lives of faith and obedience that in our last hour we are not obliged to leave our children to the mercies of a cold world, but can transfer our ownership to God, resting on his infinite and immutable promise that they shall be "beloved for the fathers' sake." Far better inheritance that for them, than houses and equipage, than bonds and stocks, than business and position.

Beloved of God! He who is that has nothing more for which he needs to ask. Let him only follow the leadings of that love, and all the gracious possibilities of life are within his reach, and afterward there is all heaven to come. However much it is incumbent upon all to be religious, it is emphatically so in the case of those who are heads of households, for other interests than their personal welfare are at stake. They are solemnly bound to do their utmost for their children, and how can they discharge that responsibility while by their indifference or un-

belief they are standing between those children and the special and priceless privileges promised to those who are blessed with Christian parentage?

And neither must it be forgotten that since in the ordinance of our lives men are "beloved for the fathers' sake," there is a special responsibility resting upon those who as children enjoy or have enjoyed the religious nurture and spiritual advantages of a Christian home. All the ordinary appeals of God through his Word and Spirit are made to them, every reason which comes with urgency to others to induce them to live lives of faith and obedience presses equally upon them, but over and above that is the argument and persuasion of the particular and sacred relation in which they stand to God. If they are among the "beloved for the fathers' sake," then for that love's sake and the fathers' sake, they have mighty cause to prove themselves worthy of those fathers and that love. Sons or daughters of Christian parents may have some special plan which they are bent upon carrying out, but it is not wise or right or safe to do it, if it would be a grief to the Christian parents who trained them and because of whom the gracious ministry of the

divine affection is busy in their behalf. It is doubly sinful for the young man or woman who came from a religious home to be selfish or reckless or irreligious in the conduct of life. They of all others are bound to be cautious, thoughtful, devout, consecrated in their purposes and actions. Their position has its special responsibilities, which must not be forgotten or ignored. "Beloved for the fathers' sake," they must so use their advantage that they shall come to be beloved for their own sake, and by their own fidelity and piety become the occasion of like blessing to others who come after them.

There is no class in the congregation for whom I feel profounder concern than irreligious heads of families. They occupy positions of commanding influence. They are examples, lawgivers, rulers to their children. Their views of truth and duty are accepted as unquestionable. While they resist or reject or ignore religion, those who imitate them in every thing else follow them in this also. And so there are growing up among us numbers of sturdy boys and fair girls, who are fast moving on toward active life with no God, no Christ, no faith, no care for religious things. In their frail boats they are heading

for the world's stormy sea, where the waves of sin are rolling and the wild winds of numberless temptations are all abroad. These fathers and mothers are painstaking and self-sacrificing, that their children may be well dressed and educated, and acquire good social positions and start well in business, but they lift no finger, make no sign, to help those children seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. On the contrary, they throw the whole weight of their influence in the opposite scale, and by their personal unbelief or indifference virtually say to those children that religion is of no importance. Friends, how are those children to be reached by holy influences which you know would work them infinite good? Not one of you but would feel safer about the future of your son and daughter if you knew that they were sincere Christians. And yet you are hindering it with the whole stress of your example. You send them to the Sabbath-school one hour in one day and keep them in the infidel school of your irreligious life all the rest of the week. Which instruction will be likely to make the most impression? You stand as an impenetrable wall between them and the truth of the gospel and the persuasions

of the divine Spirit. You deprive them of the covenant blessings of those who are "beloved for the fathers' sake." I say to you with infinite pity and yet with all plainness, that if you send those children out into the world without the protection which the grace of God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ affords, and they come to wretchedness and wreck in consequence, you will be responsible for it. You may call these harsh words, but they are true words and you know it. Is there any thing stranger than that you should be willing to expend so much to provide your children with accomplishments, and so little to build up their character, and nothing at all to secure them a blessed immortality?

And the time in which many of us can exert gracious influences will soon be past. The children will be beyond our reach, shaping life for themselves. We ourselves shall be silent in the grave. How pressing the duty to be up and doing at once! How God's command and parental affection and the children's needs urge upon fathers and mothers here to begin the Christian life to-day, so that sons and daughters may come under the power of holy example and instruction, and come into the privileges of those who are

"beloved for the fathers' sake," and that parents and children may all be gathered into the Redeemer's blessed fold, and enter, an unbroken family, into the life and joy of heaven.

VIII.

The Messenger and the Message.

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"And God said unto Moses, . . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." — EXODUS 3: 14.

THESE words are at once the essence and the climax of the training which Moses received to prepare him to become a minister and teacher of God's ancient people. It is true that the processes of his education for that office were many and complex. His experience was a marvelous one, and marvelously instructive. His reed cradle rocked on the currents of the Nile, the sound of whose soft-going waters was his infant lullaby; his transference as an adopted child to the palace of the Pharaohs; his boyhood and early manhood passed among the splendors of the court; his religious feeling nursed and developed under the pressure of the solemn mysteries of the superstitions of Egypt; his banishment from the royal presence; his growing sense of the outrage and cruelty inflicted upon his fellow-countrymen, for whom there seemed to be

no helper in heaven or earth; the desert solitudes in which he passed his exile, the silent clouds and his voiceless flocks his only society, forcing him to keep company with his own thoughts, great Horeb towering up over his head, a wonder by day and a gloom by night, — how all these experiences and memories and surroundings must have wrought to create a grand type of character and make him a man of power! Such environments inevitably gender force. When nature and society and dramatic experiences combine to shape a human life, it is impossible for it to be commonplace.

But these agencies, effective as they are, were not sufficient to fashion the Hebrew leader to the divine ideal. Some revelation from the invisible world must be made to him, that he might comprehend the sublimity and divinity of his mission. Some supernatural element of force must be added to energy of character. Some inspiration must be supplied other than that caught from circumstances and surroundings. And so God kindles the glory of his presence in the flaming bush of Horeb, and out of the fire Moses hears a voice defining his mission and investing him with authority. All the antecedent experiences of his

life had done necessary preparatory work, but now and here he receives his commission and his anointing. He is to attempt this work not simply or chiefly because he has been trained into fitness for it, but because God has called him. He is to succeed in it, not merely because he is elect among men in breadth of culture, but mostly because I AM has sent him. It is the fact that God is with him and God is using him that gives him confidence and gives other men confidence in him. The revelation of Horeb is the last and completing stroke in the long process of shaping. The flame and the voice are the potent agencies that transfigure and weld into one all previous forces at work, and transform the Hebrew herdsman into a fit and mighty messenger to sorrowing and captive Israel.

There are many modern theories as to what is essential to the effectiveness of the modern ministry. Pulpit success is a complexity of threads and colors. That a warp of piety is indispensable no serious man questions; but given that, how much more is considered to be integral in the make-up of a preacher who can command the ear of the public! He must be a scholar, familiar with all the continents of thought; a traveler, acquainted with the

classic lands of old knowledge; an explorer, hunting for new realms of truth, bringing from both old and new the things which will inspire men with interest. He must be a thinker, his brain creative, able to build chaos into order, to make something out of nothing, and on occasion to make nothing out of something; his mind a busy laboratory, where solution and distillation and combination and crystallization of ideas, and all the varied processes of intellectual chemistry go on briskly and continuously. He must be ready of speech, having the trick or skill to put thought into comely phrase that is sweet in sound, attractive in dress, flaming in intensity. He must be versatile so that there will be variety in his thoughts and words, so that he will be elastic in adapting himself and his speech to the shifting moods of the humanity he addresses. He must combine in his single personality the elements of eminence in many different callings, and combine them in such proportionate measure that he shall escape the imputation of being unbalanced and erratic. If the ideal of the aggregate opinion on the matter is the true one, the preacher who aspires to power in his work, in our time, for a different reason but with equal earnestness, like

the great apostle, may voice his difficulties in the cry: "Who is sufficient for these things?"

That all these items of equipment enumerated are of value and have their use is undeniably true, and yet their relative importance is likely to be exaggerated. Of supreme moment to men in other positions, they are only subordinately essential to the preacher of the gospel. His work lies apart from all other human callings, and success in his work is something special, different in fiber, and unlike in character to all other achievements which men call success. There have been great scholars who as Christian ministers have been great failures. There have been profound Christian thinkers who, with all their researches, have somehow missed the high road to men's hearts. There have been brilliant Christian orators, masters of ornate and fervid speech, who have built their utterances into massive arguments, and illumined them with the splendors of imagination, and beautified them with all the graces of an opulent rhetoric, and the world has flocked to hear them, and the world has sat and listened to them with admiration, and the world has gone away unchanged, as hard and selfish and wicked as it came. These qualities and attainments, so indis-

pensable and so infallible in securing eminence in other directions, are relatively impotent and insignificant in the work of the Christian ministry, because that work is unique in its character, special in its ends, apart and alone in the conditions that determine its successful prosecution. All these qualities and attainments have their helpful use, but they are not the invincible forces, the quickening life, the transfiguring flame of that proclamation of the gospel which makes it "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation."

The truth is, and the quicker and more clearly we recognize it the better, the truth is, that in these days the innermost secret of effective preaching is being too largely buried out of sight. The endeavor of our age is to reduce every thing to a science, to discover in the working of natural laws a solution of all difficulties, and to find in the proper arrangement and use of natural conditions all the force which men need to make them victorious in whatever they undertake. But a really successful ministry of the gospel can not be reached within those limitations. There is a wider area from which inspiration must be drawn; another and mightier force to be utilized. The supernatural element in preaching is the thing of

most account. Moses has had more influence over the world than Plato, though Plato was possibly the wiser of the two; or than Aristotle, though Aristotle was the profounder thinker of the two; or than Demosthenes, though Demosthenes was the greater orator of the two, because, while these men had all the furnishing that native talent and the broadest human culture could give them, they had only that; while Moses drew his chief inspiration direct from God, and his human deficiency was supplemented by the exhaustless energies of Almightiness. And that way always lies the highest power over men. One word that unmistakably comes out of the great, silent, spiritual world about us and above us outweighs in force all human argument and eloquence; one flash of radiance from the immediate divine presence is more revealing than the flickering aurora of the most brilliant speculation, or the dim twilight of the conclusions of the schools. It was not Moses learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but Moses going on his errand because "I AM had sent him," who got audience of the people; not Moses with his diplomacy and strategy, but Moses with God at his side, attesting his presence with signs and wonders,

who led Israel out of captivity and into the promised land.

And the ministry of our times errs greatly and loses greatly if it fails to make high account of the fact, not that it has but that it is of divine authority. Every man who has a right to stand up in the pulpit and preach the gospel holds a divine commission, not technically or by some trick of words, but actually and absolutely. It is nothing against the integrity of this claim that the preacher has had no precise and definable call to his office in the form of some striking and unusual manifestation of the divine will. The slow, subtle shapings and leadings of providence are quite as miraculous as some sudden wonder that flames a moment and is gone.

Analyze the history of any true Christian minister and you find that his life has been full of significant experiences and events. The avenues to other employments have been mysteriously closed against him. Worldly ambitions have been chastened. The spiritual needs of men have pressed closer and harder upon him. In visions by night, out of the Macedonia of dreams, voices have drifted to his ears with their pleading, "Come over and help us." Disappointments and

sorrows have been allotted to him, and often in the desert solitudes of his grief and trials he has seen the burning bush flaming with the presence of God. The worth and power of the gospel has grown upon him until it has come to be the priceless and invincible word of divine truth. All events and experiences have worked together to bid him be a minister of Jesus Christ, and forbid him to be any thing else. And that is a divine call and commission.

We confuse the truth by our misleading phraseology. Men talk about the profession of the ministry. The ministry is not a profession, it is an office; and those who rightfully occupy it are divinely elected and appointed to it. A right understanding of his office is essential to the minister. It makes him conscientious, watchful, and careful, "that he may please Him who has chosen him." It gives him confidence. The word which he speaks he speaks not of himself. It stimulates his courage, and he utters his message "whether men will hear or whether they will forbear;" whether the truth be edged with the sharpness of the sword, or burning with the intensity of white heat, or redolent with the dew and bloom of Carmel and Sharon. It undergirds him with

support, and in the presence of obloquy and opposition and persecution "none of these things move him, neither is life counted dear, if he may finish his course and the ministry which he has received from the Lord Jesus." And in all this there is no tinge of personal conceit or assumption of personal superiority. The organ that under the touch of the master opens its multitudinous mouths and pours forth its flood of consenting and conflicting chords and discords, whose waves surge through nave and chancel and choir, and break and die away in sweetness among the high-groined arches, may not claim the merit of the music, for to-morrow, under the handling of some crude amateur, it may pipe as meanly and shrilly as the boy's toy whistle. The minister can claim nothing; he is insignificant, only a man; the ministry can not claim too much; it is a sovereign office, ordained of God.

This specialty of the ministerial office, which its occupant needs to recognize for his own sake, he is bound to assert for the world's sake. "I AM has sent him," and he must not be reticent or diffident about proclaiming the fact. To make men feel that is the secret and essential of his success. It is impossible to weight that point with

too much emphasis. If a preacher expects to compel attention and secure conviction among his hearers by sheer force of intellectual ability, or power of thought, or heat of earnestness, or fascination of style, he grossly miscalculates. His supreme effort ought to be to stand in the pulpit as the acknowledged representative of God, and so to hide himself that the people see and listen to God, not him. The apostolic canon has never been abrogated or bettered: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Is it an untenable theory that the decay of the influence of the pulpit in these days that are upon us is largely due to the contempt or neglect into which this idea of the divine appointment of the ministry has fallen? That there has been such a wave of influence can not fairly be denied. It is true there are ecclesiastical mathematicians who collate their statistics of church growth, and when we look at their tabulated figures we see their side of the matter, but when we look at our congregations and communities we see another and equally well proven side. And numerical attendance upon public worship is not the only signifi-

cant factor. There is a lowering of the tone of the public thought in its estimate of the work of the ministry which admits of but one interpretation. "Why," asks a writer in The London Times, "why this preaching? Why does this man talk to us? Who is he that he should talk? Ministers are simple nuisances." A caustic critic in one of the most popular American periodicals brusquely says: "Reading men know where to find better reading than can possibly be furnished by any man who is bound to write two or even one sermon a week; and to train a corps of young men in the expectation that any considerable fraction of them will be able to win and maintain a commanding influence in their parishes by their discourses, is to do them the greatest injury, by cherishing expectations which never can be realized." These may be called extreme utterances, but they are directly in the line of a large drift of popular sentiment. The fact is, the preaching of the gospel has been secularized in the common thought about it. It is a mere human proceeding, has no authority except such as attaches to its inherent ability, has no special importance beyond the fact that it aims somewhat higher than the lyceum or the political address. The divine war-

rant for it and the divine element in it are utterly ignored. The one characteristic that isolates it and gives it its sacred efficiency is denied, and never until ministers preach under the inspiration of the knowledge that they are divinely commissioned messengers, and men admit that their commission is divine, can the Christian pulpit occupy its true place and exhibit its true power in the community.

It is easy to see how this theory of the ministerial office defines and limits the work of a minister. If a man is a divine messenger, then he has no concern with any thing but the message he is appointed to deliver. If "I AM" has sent him, then he is to utter only the words which he is commanded to speak. That limitation rules out at once a vast amount of what passes for preaching. How much that is called preaching is simply thinking and speaking along lines of human speculation! He tells the people what he thinks about the message, and wherein the message is faulty, and how the message can be bettered. No wonder such discourse as that proves ineffective. It may please the ear or excite the curiosity or gratify the taste, but it has no power over the heart. It has no lightnings to burn the air clear

of moral miasma, no revelation to make to men groping in darkness, no sovereign command to proclaim that is supreme enough to marshal human lawlessness into obedience. No medicine for soul sickness, no splendor of promise to transfigure the murk and gloom of life with the glory of faith and hope. It is simply the mist that rises from the shallow, and often stagnant, pools of human speculation, unsubstantial, evanescent, its influence for evil greater than its power for good.

The preacher who is conscious of his divine calling as a messenger of God is expected to have faith in the message. Without the preparation and inspiration that comes from actual commerce with the truth, preaching is perfunctory and cold. There should be no mistake nor loose thinking on this point. The cultivation of personal faith in the truth is a prerequisite to a powerful proclamation of the truth. God in these last days builds no Sinais on which he descends in visible glory to give his law. He sends his truth through human experiences, and so out of human lips; and the faith of the man by whom he sends is essential to quick receptivity and accurate transmission of the message. The

index needle used in ocean telegraphy is so highly charged with magnetic force that it sways and swings under the impulse of the most attenuated electric current, and in your child's thimble can be generated battery power sufficient to report the conclusions of parliaments or the gossip of the streets on the other side of the Atlantic. It is the soul made receptive and responsive by implicit faith that catches and passes on the lightest whisper and the loudest thunder from the great continents the other side the sea, that parts the world of sense from the world of spirit.

It is therefore a misfortune and an impediment that any of the ministry of our time are in a state of mental incertitude, their most positive belief the belief that they are not sure what they believe. This age requires affirmative preaching based on definite convictions. It may seem to argue humility for a man to be vague in his acceptance and utterance of doctrine, but that mood, whether baseborn or well begotten, can compass nothing but inefficiency. Thistledown in the pulpit can not preach convincingly to positivism in the pews, nor breast for a moment the whirlwind of speculative skepticism that is storming through the land. The great truths of God are knowable.

Inspiration, atonement, moral law, the certitudes of the hereafter, — these things are in and of the very fiber of revelation, and they assert themselves in verse and chapter and book and volume, as the patterns wrought in thread of gold glow on the surface of royal tapestry. If a man has not made up his mind about them, his place is in the school studying first principles, not in the pulpit dispensing platitudes and parentheses. Uncertain faith in the preacher means certain unfaith in the hearer. It is not on sciolists and dreamers that the tongues of flame descend and rest. It is knowledge of the truth, out of which to speak the truth, that transfigures men, making them flaming apostles and sending them on their triumphant mission. An unbelieving ministry is limp and impotent, an offence to God, a curse to the Church, and a laughing-stock to the world.

But if the preacher who brings the message must believe the message in order to deliver it aright, so must the people who hear it, in order to receive it aright. If the word that is brought to a congregation Sabbath by Sabbath is acknowledged by them to be the Word of the Lord, that simple recognition removes numberless obstacles from its road of access to the heart. All human accidents

of style, vehicle, method, manner, become matters indifferent. Earthen pitcher or golden flagon, what do we care in which it is brought if we may put to our lips the draught from the river of God? Rough John the Baptist, with raiment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins, has polish enough for us if he only brings us the Word of the Lord. What vast changes would be wrought if men only grasped the absolute truth that every gospel sermon is a direct divine communication! What a hush would come over religious assemblies! What an awe would be on all faces! What holy reverence in all hearts! How these churches of ours would lose their commonness and change to sacred places, becoming in turn Horebs of revelation, and Hermons of transfiguration, and Pisgahs of outlook, from whose summits we caught the gleam of the fair city of God! How all our base, bad, petty, selfish, worldly estimates and prejudices that steel the heart against the truth would be swept away, and men would wait with breathless eagerness to know what God the Lord had to say to them! Preaching will never be the sublime reality, the almost omnipotent force it was designed to be, until the minister is sure and the people are sure

that by it and through it, it is God himself who speaks.

Manifestly, therefore, the preacher is not at liberty to abridge or alter his message. He is to deliver it just as it is and all that it is; and this restriction holds good in regard to quality as well as quantity. If he has no right to drop out from Scripture chapter or verse, neither has he a right in the name of criticism to omit from verse or chapter their evident meaning. If he has no right to substitute a sentence of his own for a passage of inspiration, neither has he a right to put a sentiment of his own in the place of the mind of the Spirit. The dilution of doctrine and the denial of doctrine are grades of the same error. The gospel is an assemblage of truths, all of which and the whole of which need to be known. There is no superfluity of revelation. There are no teachings designed to test men's ingenuity in interpretation. The New Testament is not a camping-ground for intellectual sluggards, but neither is it a hunting-ground where the Nimrods of criticism may exhibit their marksmanship. The gospel is a compend of practical truth. Its contents are fitted to every condition of human experience. It has warning for the sinner, en-

couragement for the struggling, light for the sorrowing, hope for the lost. It has a promise for the cradle and an assurance for the death-bed; a lesson for the home, the farm, the shop, the factory, the sanctuary. Men all need it, and they need all of it. Jesus pronounced a woe upon him who "should break one of these least commandments;" is it a lighter offence to ignore or endeavor to break the force of one least teaching of revelation? There need be no mistake in this matter, and no difficulty in determining the methods and limits of legitimate investigation. The conservatism that pleads for caution in the handling of Scripture is the conservatism of proper reverence, not bondage to old forms of interpretation. There is sometimes a recklessness which in the name of scholarship undertakes dishonest and dangerous work. It grows out of a misconception of the substance and character of the Word of God. It seems a harmless change of phrase to say that the Bible contains a revelation, instead of asserting that it is a revelation. And yet, practically, that slight difference in statement eventuates in a wide divergence of methods and conclusions. If the Holy Word only contains a revelation, then who constitute

the high court of judicature to determine what that revelation is? The settlement of the question inevitably reverts to individual opinion. One man has the same right as another to investigate and decide, and one man investigates with caution and another with dynamite, and what becomes of the message? Some of the results of this much-lauded method of individualism justify the demand of the man who called for a copy of the reversed New Testament. It is the preacher's responsibility to maintain the integrity of the divine Word, and give to men, not the message which it contains, but the message which it is. Holy Scripture is not a transport wagon laden with truths precious and teachings indifferent, and the preacher a man authorized to sort the packages and decide which shall be delivered and which withheld. Holy Scripture is the chariot of the Lord of hosts, the form of the Son of man riding serene and sovereign in its triumphal car, all parts and particulars of it instinct with august symbolism; history and psalm and prophecy and epistle and Apocalypse, out of whose agreement it is builded, each some separate shade of the one and sufficient revelation of God. What God has joined together who shall put asunder? What God has honored

in its entirety who shall presume to criticize in particulars? Blazoned all over with the ineffable name, who dares erase a single stroke of the divine hand? or distort or diminish the significance of the smallest letter of inspiration? The preacher is about perilous business who brings to men another message or a lesser message than the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

And how all that has been said grows august and edges itself with keenness when we consider God's intent in commissioning his messengers, and the meaning and power of the message with which he entrusts them. This gospel to be preached is the Word of life and hope to a lost world. Smother the truth in what smooth phrase you please, hide it for the moment with some passing pageant of material prosperity, and still the fact remains that this is a lost world, and men left to themselves are helpless and hopeless. A traveler has told us that there is a cliff overhanging a Mediterranean city, where if one stands he hears all sounds below him rising and blending in a minor chord. The outlook is bright and inspiriting. The azure of the sea melts into the azure of the horizon. The vineyards green the slopes of the surrounding hills. The softness of Italian

color is in the sky. Palace and cottage gleam whitely through the unobscuring air. All that meets the eye is a dream of beauty. But the voice, the articulation of the human life below, is a wail. The children's laughter, the hum of trade, the lap of the waves on the beach, the music of festival processions, — all come up to the listener's ear set on the key of a Miserere. There are points of view from which this world seems a wonder and a delight. The march of its industrial enterprise, its advance in knowledge, its growing mastery over the subtlest forces of nature, its distances annihilated, its wildernesses reclaimed, its deserts transformed to gardens, — all these sights beget the illusion that it is well with the world.

But there are heights of moral discernment where God sits always, and to which some men climb, where, in spite of the beauty that meets the eye, the ear hears the true voice of human life, as it moans and sobs in the agony of its apartness from God. The air is full of sounds — the thunder of the mills, the clink of gold, the laughter of careless pleasure, the dreamy music of the dance — but stand where all voices blend into one, and you hear not a pæan of victory, but a prayer for

mercy. This is a lost world, and it is solely because it is a lost world that the divine messenger and the divine message are sent, that men may be led to such a knowledge of Christ crucified that he shall become to them "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation." And as we stand face to face to-day with these truths, and recognize them as truths, I think that there must come to some of us, if not to all of us, the feeling that we have misunderstood and underrated this service of public worship in which Sabbath by Sabbath we engage.

We have been in the habit of considering the preachers to whom we have listened as merely men, and have forgotten that they were messengers. We have judged the preaching which we have heard by the canons of ordinary criticism, instead of being solely concerned to know whether it was the Word of God. So we have made small reasons sufficient excuse for being absent, and have been apathetic when we were present, and so have iron-plated ourselves against the convictions and persuasions and quickening which otherwise would have come to us from the preaching of the gospel. Is it not time to cry halt! to this under-estimate and misuse of God's chosen instru-

mentality for the conversion of the world? Going to church is dull business! Yes, if you go to hear what a man has to say, but not if you go to hear what God has to say. Preaching, as a rule, is stupid! Yes, often, if you judge it as you do the lecture or the oration, by its style and imagery and humor and novelty; but not if you are hungry to know divine truth and eager to receive with meekness the ingrafted word that is able to save your souls. May God so open our minds and hearts that when we come into this church it may be the preacher's ambition to speak, and the people's wish and hope to hear, not platitudes, or brilliancies, or philosophies, or human ingenuities of thought and phrase; but the simple message of the gospel, the minister the mouthpiece, his utterances the words of Jesus Christ, the people caring for nothing so much as to hear the voice of the Lord. And then the splendor of the divine presence will be here, and souls be awake and elate, and the Lord make bare his arm, and his hand stretch out to us the scepter of salvation, and the church be to every one of us the home of God and the gate of heaven.

IX.

Glory and Beauty.

IX.

GLORY AND BEAUTY.[1]

"And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." —EXODUS 28: 2, 3.

RELIGION always has held and always must hold a peculiar and solitary position among the forces operative in society. Its functions are unique, and therefore its adaptations and methods are logically held to be unique also. Any right conception of it starts with the recognition of its supernatural origin, and that specialty of its constitution removes it from the ordinary sphere of ethical and scientific criticism. It is not to be judged as we judge of a system or a theory or a philosophy, which is the result of a purely human discovery or construction. The measuring lines with which we determine the compass of religion and the balances in which we weigh its value must be more delicate and accurate than those with which we test the generalizations from

[1] Preached before the Massachusetts Convention of Congregational Ministers, 1885.

experiment, or the final "therefores" of a syllogism. The theodolite and the chain are of no use in the survey of the kingdom of God. We must insist upon this solitariness of religion both in position and substance, and demand that the criticisms upon it be genuine, adequate, equitable, and within the limits prescribed by the nature of the case.

The utter neglect of this canon makes room for the many and too generally accepted strictures upon Old Testament religion. On the face of it there is pertinence in the criticisms which a modern school of loose thinkers pass upon the minuteness and apparent triviality of the requirements of the Pentateuch. On our plane of thought it seems a belittling of God to represent him as prescribing the number and form of a man's ablutions, the food he is to eat, the postures he is to assume, the cut and color of the garments he is to wear. The higher spiritual conceptions of deity which obtain in modern times disgust us with the apparent materialism of the ancient cultus. It is hard for us to see any thing commendable or desirable in slain beasts and smoking altars, and bellowing trumpets and clouds of incense, and robes of purple and scarlet. Our faith in the teaching

of Jesus that "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," prejudices us against all opposing practice, and unfits us for any fair judicial estimate of the worth and significance of older and cruder forms. And so some hold with Theodore Parker that the Old Testament is "a bloody old book," while others, and they are many, contend that the grossnesses and puerilities of its prescriptions vacate its claim to be a word of God, and they summarily consign it with Vedas and Institutes of Menu and Book of Mormon to the limbo of superstitious fraud and exploded falsehood.

But Judaism, like every other religion, was a system by itself, and must be criticized under that limitation, and under the still further limitation of its historic date and the condition of the people for whom it was appointed. The question is not what position Judaism would occupy in the civilization of to-day, but what *was* its place and value in the earlier time. It is not competent to examine the Mosaic age with the nineteenth century microscope. We are, to borrow a phrase from science, to find out how it "harmonized with its environment," and bearing that restriction in mind we rule out a great deal that arrogates to itself the title of the higher criticism.

The function of the Jewish religion was limited. In the nature of the case it was initial and alphabetic. It was God's first formulated utterance respecting himself, his claims, and the duties which men owed him. There had been previous knowledge of him, but it was vague, atmospheric, insufficient. From the beginning the heavens had declared the glory of God and the firmament showed his handiwork, but men wildly misread the teachings of nature. There had always been evidence of law, and a ruler behind the law, but the interpretation of providence had varied with the temperament and circumstances of those who studied it. The ante-Mosaic religion as we know it was an incoherent, always shifting congeries of beliefs and practices. The first purpose of Judaism was to secure definiteness, to furnish men with a center of faith and a law of conduct, to crystallize vagrant and conflicting speculations into a system which should be recognized as authority. And this system was to be adapted to society in its simplest form. The Jews in Moses' time were a nation of children. As a mass, they were ignorant, intellectually narrow, insensitive to pure truth. Their education was necessarily the education of children, the instruction of the picture-

book, the object-lesson, the event: entrance to mind and heart forced through the avenue of the senses. The alphabetic religion of people under those conditions must inevitably be a religion of forms and ceremonies, and minute prescriptions and absolute requirements. The men of that day had no experience in processes of thought, and they were spared the thinking of which they were not capable by the abrupt and final "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" of the commandment. They had no conception of pure spiritual truth; but the altar, the streaming blood, the smoking sacrifice, the gorgeous vestments, appealed to the dull apprehension and inspired the desire, while it prepared the way for the recognition and reception of the divine teachings of which these things were the significant symbols. The Old Testament as the last word of God to men would be insufficient; as the first word it is adequate and wonderful. The alphabet is as admirable in its way as the poem or the history into which human thought arranges it. Judaism as a finality in religion would mock men with its insufficiency, but Judaism as the Genesis of the revelation of God to man is the seal and prophecy of the Apocalypse, the streak of morning

dawn that foreruns and draws after it the splendors of millennial noon.

Among the mass of these ancient symbolic teachings, perhaps no one is of more signal and practical importance than that conveyed in the words under consideration. "And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, for glory and for beauty." The ancient priesthood in many particulars occupied the place and fulfilled the same office as the modern creed. We formulate our faith in language; to the Jew the priest was the word of doctrine made flesh and dwelling among them. That position of the priesthood was in part the result of divine ordinance, and in part inevitable in a rude age. To whatever it was due, it necessitated extreme care in the equipment of those who occupied the high station. In the popular estimate, the man who filled the office was lost sight of in the splendor of the office itself. Aaron as a man might not be above the level of other men, but Aaron as priest stood as near to God as he did to humanity in the people's thought about him. It was on that side on which he was supposed to represent that divine thought that he would be most closely watched, and for religious purposes it was supremely important that

every thing on that side should be elaborate, impressive, and significant of truth. The index hands of the clock are insignificant bits of brass or iron, of no finer grain or higher value than the metal that enters into the construction of the mechanism of the factory or the utensils of the kitchen, but when they are placed on the dial to tell how far this spinning globe has rolled through the courses of the day, they must be adjusted to cunning wheelwork with nicest care and take on authority, as expressive of the progress of the mighty dynamics of nature which bring the darkness and the light in due season, the evening and the morning in their appointed place. Aaron as man might be left to eat and drink and clothe himself after the fashion of ordinary humanity; but Aaron as minister in the holy office, Aaron as the index hand of Deity, must have every item of appearance and behavior prescribed for him. His individuality was for the time effaced. He looked and spoke and acted according as he was wrought upon by the unseen, silent God, who through him communicated to men a knowledge of himself and of his will by vestment and posture, and elect and consecrated humanity.

"And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron

thy brother, for glory and for beauty." These were the two elements that were emphasized as characteristic of true religion. They were novel elements in religion. The pre-Mosaic faiths, so far as their nature can be determined by the dim glimpses of them to which we are limited, were a compound of force and sensualism. To be afraid of God and to give reins to loose living, that is the ordinary type of religion unwrought upon by revelation. Modern naturalism which rejects revelation may protest against that definition, but modern naturalism unconsciously and in spite of itself has been so permeated and transfigured by the influence of revelation that it can not be accepted as a type. The Jews had been schooled in the oppressive superstitions of Egypt, a land that evidenced its worship of force in the colossal temples and giant statues that occupied the holy places; that evidenced its worship of the sensual by the orgies of its sacred mysteries. Even God himself got his first slight hold upon the attention of the people by the miraculous plagues that proved him a God of power. Glory and beauty, at least in their deeper ethical and spiritual meaning, were ideas that had not yet merged into the light. The people had neither the appetency

nor the capacity for them. It seemed a far-away beginning of instruction in regard to them, this use of color and glitter that simply smote the eye and impressed the senses; very rudimentary characters these purple and scarlet and jeweled robes, by means of which and up from which to spell the way to virtue and kindness and devotion and faith, which are the perfected splendors, the true glory and beauty of religion. And yet at whatever cost and however slowly, those two ideas must be ingrained in the conception of men as essential to the service which they are to render to God and in his name to humanity.

In the course of God's progressive revelation of himself and his truth to men, forms change but facts remain. The world long ago outgrew its need of the ordinances and prescriptions of Judaism. When Christ came he swept away with an unsparing hand symbols and rites that once had their most sacred significance and use. But yet so far as essentials are concerned, he taught no new religion. The truth as it is in Jesus is only the truth as it was in Moses, grown up. The priesthood of Christ is the completion of the priesthood of Aaron. All the deep interior spiritual postulates of the old dispensation are re-

affirmed in the new. The work which the ancient economy was organized to accomplish, the modern is required to continue. Glory and beauty are still and always essentials of true religion. A primitive age is not the only age that needs to be served with these credentials that a system is from God and therefore authoritative. In our times preëminently a religion that aspires to control the faith and shape the life must attest both its right and power to undertake that high work by the glory of evident Deity in it and back of it and reaching through it, and by a beauty of spirit and method and fitness which when clearly understood will draw all men to it. Glory and beauty; if our modern religion lacks these, no stringent orthodoxy of creed and confession, no traceable lineage back to fire-crowned apostles, no perfection of ecclesiastical organization, no wonder of religious architecture, no stateliness of ritual, no unanimous shout of a church constituency, "The temple of the Lord are we," — no one of these things or all together will make good the deficiency. Glory and beauty, these must glow on the surface and flame at the center of any faith that attempts with the least prospect of success to stand before men as the acknowledged representative of the will and word of God.

Judaism was set to do its work in this direction under special limitations which have expired, but Christianity does not find an absolutely clear field before it. The modern faith is in part at least the outcome of all that preceded it, a system which gathers up into itself whatever religious truths have been discovered and adjusts them each to each in a harmonious whole. And in proportion as a system grows complex, it becomes difficult to administer. To propel a canoe with the paddle is simpler work than to manage the intricate wheelwork of the engines that drive the steamship. It is easier to teach the alphabet than to give instruction in the higher mathematics. It was far less strain to fashion the garments of the priesthood after a prescribed pattern than it is to so administer Christianity that it discloses its full significance and stands in the thought of men for all that it is worth. And what is more, the modern faith has to do with highly organized society, with its variety of needs, its multitude of problems, its shifting moods, its motley phases of population, its strata of classes, its turbulent restlessness, its infinite, constant, and often unreasonable demands. To so apprehend religion, and so formulate it, and so administer it, that its glory

and beauty will be recognized and confessed by all who see it in our time, is a task which may well wring from the lips even of an inspired apostle the despairing cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And yet it is not an impossible work, for a religion that is inadequate to meet the demands of any phase or epoch of civilization is a partialism. It is certainly the work given the Church of this age to do. Let me devote the brief moments that are left me to the indication of two conspicuous characteristics of the religion that will have glory and beauty in the esteem even of this doubting and world-worshiping generation.

And first of all it must be a religion in which *supernaturalism* is the supreme factor of power. The general trend of modern speculation has been towards the elimination of that element from human faith. Sometimes openly and sometimes disguised, a strange but strong attempt is being made to legislate God out of the world. The attack on supernaturalism comes from all quarters and is directed to all points. Sometimes it is the scientist, with his babble about the sufficiency of cosmic laws. Sometimes it is the extreme evolutionist, with his order of development, asserting

that this infinite something of the universe grows in course of nature out of absolute nothing. Sometimes it is the moralist, with his sublime confidence in pure ethics. Sometimes it is the doctrinal iconoclast, making blind and furious assault upon venerable and approved truths, attempting to efface their comeliness and degrade them in the esteem of men. Sometimes it is the biblical critic, eager to impair the integrity of Scripture as a revelation from God by tilting here and there a block from its place, or disintegrating with suspicion the substance of some foundation stone, or, bent on thorough work, lowering the entire Word to the plane of naturalism, where it finds the Old Testament a fraud and the New Testament a commonplace. Sometimes it is the overworked and underpaid laboring-man who finds it hard to reconcile his weariness and wretchedness with the superintendence of a divine Father. Sometimes it is the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." These all are but different phases of the modern crusade against the supernatural. It is because the Christian Church has so feebly opposed that crusade, because it has so often grounded arms at the challenge of some sophistry, because with measureless infamy it has

kept the flag of the cross over its head as its ensign, while it outraged and trampled under foot the most signal truths for which Christ lived and died. It is therefore that so much of glory and beauty has vanished from Christianity in the esteem of the men of to-day, and religion can never regain that lost splendor and attractiveness, until it re-asserts, and that with no obscurity of phrase, that it is not the product of man's thinking and planning, but the very will and way of God.

Do you say that the remedy is impossible? that matters have progressed too far to allow of arrest? that tidal waves of thought never revert upon themselves? That depends upon whether absolute truth is behind the wave of thought, supplying it with force and volume. Modern unbelief is essentially the product of speculation, not the answer to the deep interior demands of the soul. It is shallow, superficial, abnormal, out of adjustment to the constitution of man. Speculation inflates its thin and glittering bubbles of theory, but when they come into collision with the instincts of human nature, they collapse, and of all their substance nothing remains but a shred of foam that is blown away into space. There is that

in us, and it can not be got out of us, which is not satisfied with matter and motion, with things tangible and sensible. There is music in the wind and music in the wire, and when the wind breathes upon the wire the hidden melody finds voice and the air is vibrant with sweetness. There is immortality in man, and God outside the man, and when God breathes upon the man his sublimer convictions and longings find voice, and his inmost nature, which is supernature, utters itself in the psalm which is both creed and prayer, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: When shall I come and appear before God?" Napoleon understood human nature when he said to his assembled counselors, "Gentlemen, if there is no God, we must create one." Religion is committing slow suicide when it lets go its grip on the supernatural or pauperizes its utterances in regard to it. A church that is parenthetical in its faith or statement concerning the unseen and the spiritual should make haste to purchase a shroud and arrange for burial: for unless it makes provision itself for decent obsequies, it will sooner or later be cast out into the potter's field

of popular contempt. This is not reckless vaporing or ecclesiastical cant. It is the sober truth which the verdict of all history supports.

The age of crucial experiment is passed. There have been scores of materialistic religions in the world, and the record of them in the scholar's library is all the dust of them which remains. There have been ethical religions, but while they have been to a limited degree practical, they have uniformly been prosaic, with a certain charm for philosophic minds, but utterly impotent to stir the common thought and mold the common life. It is the solemn responsibility of the Church of to-day to reëstablish the supremacy of the supernatural in religion. It must lay less stress upon the spirit of the times and abandon the weakness of courting the popular favor by acquiescing in the popular mood. It must be guarded in its approval of hypercriticism, that may turn out to be spiritual dissent disguised in the scholar's cloak. It must erect fewer altars of worship to the latest novelty in theology. It must not mistake sound for sense, and judge of the merits of a creed by the vociferousness of its adherents. It must have simple faith in God and in his word, and in the sufficiency of the provisions of grace,

and in the actuality of the spiritual world and the supremacy of spiritual forces, and in the reality of a heavenly kingdom whose builder and maker is not man, whose foundations are now being laid, and whose perfection will be reached when supernatural agencies have finished their supernatural work. And so the religion which it teaches and illustrates will be accepted as the interpretation of God to man, and so, and then, on all its institutions and offices and services will lie the splendor of the divine glory, and all its requirements and restraints and provisions will be instinct and articulate with the beauty of the divine righteousness.

The other essential to glory and beauty in religion is a *wide range of practical efficiency:* a readiness of adaptation to all the growing demands of humanity and a sufficiency with which to answer them. It has often been the mistake of what called itself Christianity that it has kept itself aloof from the real life-struggles in which the majority of men are engaged. Sometimes it has been held that religion was too sacred a thing to take down into the competitions of business and into the dust of labor, and pious energy has spent itself in rearing cathedrals and elaborating rituals. Sometimes it has been held that the

office of religion is so special that it is incapacitated from assisting in the solution of the problems that constantly arise in an advanced and complicated civilization; and so, while its ability to formulate theologies is admitted, its adequacy to settle vexed questions of social life is denied. If those theories were ever tenable, they are no longer so. If religion is not both qualified and commissioned to advise in matters of public concern, if it has no opinion to express in regard to the administration of government and no power to back its opinion, if it has no Decalogue and Sermon on the Mount applicable to the conduct of business, if it has nothing to say with reference to communism, and the vexed questions of labor and unjust social discriminations that fill the air with storm, nay more, if it has not a hand of power to thrust into this snarl of difficulties and help the wronged and the weak to their rights, it will have neither glory nor beauty in the popular esteem. And it ought not to have. There is no inadequacy in Christianity. The carpenter's Son, who came to proclaim "peace on earth and good will to men," has made provision for all ranges and measures of human want. Social demands can never be in excess of the sufficiency

of the gospel. But that limited conception and that partial employment of religion, that holds it removed from the sphere of common life, receives and deserves condemnation. The age of monasticism is past. The Christ of the cloister and the school is dumb and powerless. The efficient Christ of to-day must move about among the homes and haunts of men, as he visited of old the dwellings of Bethany and walked the streets of Jerusalem with his criticisms upon business, and his counsel to soldiers, and his rebuke of hypocrisy in high places, and his defiance of unjust government, and his infinite compassion for the poor and the oppressed, and his teaching of social righteousness as the short, straight way out of social complications. The glory and beauty of religion is to be secured by methods of administration adapted to meet the pressing practical wants of the age in which we live. The beauty of utility is better for religion and commends it more highly to the favor of the world than philosophic exactness of doctrinal statement or æsthetic and artistic rituals of worship.

Brethren of the ministry, it is upon us that the chief charge is laid in this matter. Under the old dispensation it was for Aaron the priest that the

holy garments for glory and for beauty were to be made. And under the new dispensation it is upon the ministry that it is specially incumbent so to grasp the central thought of religion, and so to magnify it and proclaim it that its true glory and beauty may be evident in the eyes of the multitude. In our purpose and methods we are to get out of the literary ease of the study and go after men. It is better to be a Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord, than a Solomon dreaming and mourning by turns in his ivory palace. We accomplish more by flaming like fiery prophets, with the message "Thus saith the Lord" on our lips, than by inditing some love-sick canticles or formulating the dreary ethics of a modern Book of Ecclesiastes. A live gospel for living men is the truth with which we are entrusted, and the utterance of that truth with the earnestness of profound conviction is the only thing that can clothe the modern ministry with "glory and beauty" in the esteem of a careless and worldly generation.

X.

Debtor to the World.

X.

DEBTOR TO THE WORLD.

"I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome." — ROMANS 1: 14, 15.

PRINCIPLES never seem so impressive as when they are seen concreted and operative in the life of some eminent man. A conclusion of truth may be logically faultless, but it gets flame and edge only when it is at work. Paul the dialectician is a man whose thoughts are to be trusted; but Paul the apostle, in the thick of his fight with the world's sin, is a man whose convictions kindle and glow with the white heat of inspirations. The worth of what he believed and asserted is best measured by what his belief made of him and enabled him to do. We listen reverently to his words as a servant of Jesus Christ, but those teachings grow solid with reality when we see how the assurance of their truth wrought in him, changing the whole tenor of his life, subsidizing every energy of his nature,

transforming the acuteness of his pagan culture into a sword-blade for the defence and furtherance of the gospel, making suffering for Christ's sake a sweet experience, and enabling him to match his robust, because sanctified, manhood successfully against the evil and darkness of his age. What Paul said he said because he knew and felt and illustrated the truth of what he said. He and his doctrine were so thoroughly part and counterpart of each other that he was a "word made flesh." The gospel of his faith reproduced itself in the gospel of his life, and so gave the world the best warrant of the genuineness and power of the truth he proclaimed. In perceiving what was admirable and matchless in him, we are really seeing how matchless and admirable is the gospel that, incarnating itself in him, transformed the bold blasphemer into the wonderful preacher of righteousness.

Now there can be no question as to Paul's right to be held up as the ideal missionary. There are many brilliant names on the long and always lengthening roll of those who have been conspicuous for their self-sacrifice and success in preaching the gospel to "the regions beyond." The luster of their character pierces the murk and

shadows of the common worldliness as the stars pour radiance through rifts in the clouds and burn brighter by contrast. These adventurous champions of the faith have been men of whom the world was not worthy. No remoteness of distance, no difficulty of transit, no hardships or dangers have hindered them from their errand. They have gone every-where preaching the Word. Their feet have been beautiful on all mountains, bringing glad tidings. All deserts have felt their transforming touch, beneath which Saharas bud and blossom as the rose. They have sown beside all waters. Where Lebanon spins from her distaffs of snow the white-threaded rivers that broider the verdant hem of her garments; where Abana and Pharpar go softly, their quiet laughter only making more slumbrous the endless summer that sleeps in the groves of Damascus; on the banks of the Nile, that pours its tawny flood through the graves of a dead land; on Pacific islands, stray children of the continent; among the icebergs of the frozen north; under the blazing belt of the equator; in the shadow of the pagoda; in the bark hut of the Indian and the kraal of the Zulu,—every-where these men and messengers of God have found their way. It has cost them something. They have

panted, fevered with thirst, in the heat of the Syrian noon; they have battled with famine and pestilence in Harpoot; they have been shot down by Turkish marauders; they have sickened and died in the malarial airs of pitiless Africa. It was a bitter price to pay for their calling, but these men and women have paid it without a murmur. They have said a long good-by to home and friends from the deck of the retreating ship, and have faded out of sight of home with a smile upon their faces. With their own hands they have turned up the sod under which to bury their children, and have made no complaint against God. They have seen the sky grow dark above them as the light of their own lives was waning, and instead of the voices of sympathizing friends, heard only the babel of the curious and chattering crowd who had gathered to see them die, and yet were confident, and often triumphant. Let the world make up the roll of its heroes, and their exploits dwindle when measured with the record of these missionaries of Christ. To be foremost among them is to be a king over kings. To stand as Paul stands, the undisputed leader of the great missionary host, is to occupy the highest place of earthly honor.

Now this ideal missionary has confided to us the secret of his eminence. It was not due to exceptional natural abilities, though unquestionably he possessed them, and exercised under other conditions and along other lines they would have made him famous. His particular success was a specialty. He had certain convictions and certain inspirations of purpose which God gave and God used to make of him an irresistible power for righteousness. It is the always fresh wonder of divine grace that it can utter itself through men in whatever phrase it will in spite of the baldness of their natural capacity.

> "The coarsest reed that trembles in the marsh,
> If heaven select it for its instrument,
> May shed celestial music on the breeze
> As clearly as the pipe whose golden tip
> Befits the lip of Phœbus."

It is not what men are by birth so much as what they are by choice that determines their record. Those who inquire after the laws that are sovereign in the realm of redemption, and submit themselves implicitly to them, are sure to become kings and priests unto God.

If we examine the text, which may be con-

sidered as the summary of Paul's scheme of life, certain salient points are discovered which, either as motive or method, were concerned in his success. They were not local and temporary, and so merely historical. They have room and opportunity to work in all ages, and never more freely and efficiently than in our time. The missionaries of to-day who are facing the exigencies and difficulties of their high calling can gain no more profitable knowledge than Paul's conception of the office; can get no more intense and enduring enthusiasm than he found in the feelings and convictions that inspired and sustained him in his work.

Note, then, —

I. — PAUL HAD A GOSPEL TO PREACH.

He was an acute philosopher, versed in all the subtleties of the schools; but he did not devote his life to metaphysical speculations. He was an accomplished pupil in the intricacies of Jewish ritualism, but he had no time to waste in propagating formalism. He had found a gospel, a message of glad tidings from above, the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation, and he was so impressed and possessed by it that he

longed for nothing so ardently as to give it utterance, to be its voice crying in the wilderness of men's spiritual needs. He was a not a modern critic, — inquisitorial, sarcastic, incredulous, whose creed was a maximum of words and a minimum of doctrine, — but he "knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded that he was able to keep that which he had committed unto him." His views of truth were positive, not tentative. He did not lay sheriff hands on the stern utterances of revelation and arrest them for obtaining credence under false pretences. He accepted the gospel in all its phases as from God. Its mountains of transfiguration, its gloomy Gethsemanes, its blood atonement, its single condition of salvation, the glory of its heavenly city and the darkness of its endless night, he thoroughly believed in them all, and wrought with the enthusiasm of his conviction. Men were perishing; men might be rescued; and so, though the Jews required a sign, and the Greeks sought after knowledge, he preached Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness. The casuistry of the schools and the criticism of the sidewalk were alike nothing to him. As Ulysses sailed past the island of the sirens, chanting the praises of the

immortal gods so loudly that all the bewitching songs that were wafted from the shore seemed only empty noise, so Paul had a conviction and a possession of the gospel that neither praise nor blame could disturb. His theology mastered him, spoke from his lips, breathed from his life, was the atmosphere with which he walked encompassed. His utter faith in its truth and his intense enthusiasm for its truth made him the fiery and irresistible messenger of the gospel.

And no man who doubts, and no church which questions, the truth of Scripture can have large missionary enthusiasm. If the gospel is not accepted in its simplicity and its comprehensiveness, in its length and breadth and height and depth, with all its assertions and inferences, its lights and its shadows, there is an essential lack of fitness for the work of the world's evangelization. This world can not be molded into righteousness by half-believers. Men whose minds are a chemist's laboratory, in which they pulverize and dissolve and distill and evaporate the truths of the gospel, in the hope of crystallizing a creed that shall have no sharp angles and no unwelcome flavor, have no chance with paganism, which is positive, if nothing else. It is when the gospel

of God, and God in his gospel is sovereign in the esteem of the Church, that it becomes an irresistible preacher of the truth. A missionary church has no use for surmises and parentheses. It must know whereof it affirms, and speak because it can not but speak the things which it has seen and heard. The Church of God gets no leverage on the world unless it has for its fulcrum the conviction, held without evasion or reservation, that the Scriptures, the whole Scriptures, and nothing but the Scriptures, are the Word of life. And when it carries that word to men the first essential of success is unquestioning, honest, personal confidence in it.

II. — PAUL HAD AN ADEQUATE CONCEPTION OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY.

I put emphasis on that word adequate, for it expresses a mental and moral state in which are largely found the hidings of the apostle's power. As a rule, how much men will do for the world depends to a very considerable extent upon how much they think the world has a right to claim from them. The affluent souls who never calculate, but, like prodigal nature, give because it is the law of their being to give, are rare. There

is a reserve of selfishness in most men that makes duty and sacrifice in part a matter of moral arithmetic. They must be convinced before they contribute. Their consciousness of responsibility will largely determine the measure of their actual consecration. They are conscientious; they will withhold nothing that is due from them, but they are saving; they will not spend themselves unless some claim for that spending can be established. And the danger is, the common mistake is, that the rate of responsibility is put too low. Men exaggerate their right of withholding, and dispute the demands made upon them for outlay; and so, while meaning to be honest, sometimes unwittingly rob God.

The question of responsibility for the conversion of the world is often discussed on too low a level. The spiritual destitution of a vast part of humanity is recognized; the duty of the Church to meet it in some measure is admitted. At the same time the extent of our obligation to remote areas and alien nations is a problem, and a complicated one. The Church often, in our times preeminently, seems like the band of Thermopylæ, a handful opposed to a multitude. There is flame and fury enough of battle within arm's length. It

is a marked characteristic of our modern civilization that in proportion as what we call its triumphs multiply, its spiritual necessities increase, or at least become more evident. It is our boast, and not an empty one, that nineteenth century Christendom is the highest tide level of history. Anglo-Saxon civilization in particular is a splendid blossoming of the possibilities of humanity. In enterprise and enthusiasm and achievement industrial, intellectual, and beneficent, there has been magnificent advance. Our swift pace shames the slow creeping of earlier times. If we look at only one side of current life it seems as if the millennial day had already begun to dawn. And yet in what wonderful contrast to all this are the colossal shadows that deepen as the light intensifies. Rome never heard such a wail as "the bitter cry of outcast London." The problems raised by the swarming and motley life of our great cities are at least in their recognized urgency essentially modern. The sunlight that gilds the mountain-tops reveals the morasses as well. If we recognize more tonic in the air we have grown conscious also of more miasma. The want around our own door-stones, the perils that threaten our own churches, the evils that thrust themselves upon our notice in

our land, malignant, portentous, gigantic — have we not enough and more than enough on our hands in dealing with them? How can it be competent to press the claims of remote continents? Why should we project our energies to telescopic distances when woe and want and sin incredible are riotous and clamorous within microscopic nearness?

Now Paul cut all these knotted problems with a single stroke, and found an answer to all perplexing questions in what to him was a sovereign fact: "I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." It is not a question of careless generosity on my part, nor merely a question of comparative philanthropy; but this lost and dying world has a bill against me and is urgent for payment. As a steward of the gospel, I have put into my hands and in trust the bread to satisfy all this hunger, the medicine for all this sickness, the power that can still this bitter wail of sorrow and sin that goes up day and night from palace and hovel, from shop and street, from all places where men live and suffer, and I am debtor. Necessity is laid upon me to administer this trust. Woe is me if I preach not the gospel, not in the nearest place,

not where I can do it the easiest and with best care for myself, but where it will sound the loudest, be heard the farthest, save the most. All other questions are babble and noise compared with the sovereign question: How shall I discharge the responsibility that weights me down in the fact "I am debtor."

Is it unfair to say that often, nowadays, responsibility for missionary work is too much a matter of sentiment and too little an invincible conviction? too largely a halfway conclusion halfheartedly reached by a limping and cold series of arguments; too little a consciousness of duty kindled into a consuming heat in a soul responsive to the touch of God? On our lower planes of consecration Paul's conception of responsibility may seem exaggerated, but was it in fact? To what extent may a lost world rightfully press its claims upon a Church that has, and has in trust, a gospel of salvation? That Church can hardly content itself with home work while the air over Olivet is still vibrant with the words of the great commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It can not drug itself into apathy with the creed that human need is not after all so imminent, and that the other side

the vail divine mercy will do what Christian faithlessness has left undone, else why the tireless zeal of apostles, and the fire that flames in the words of evangel and epistle, and the high symbol of the Apocalypse, the angel having the everlasting gospel, hurrying on swift wings to all lands to anticipate Judgment Day and the end of all things? This is not a matter to be disposed of with a simple disclaimer. The question of responsibility is in court, and the Church must face it and meet it, not with pettifogging and special pleading, but in the loyal spirit that asks and prepares to be obedient to the answer to the question: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Beyond all controversy right views of responsibility are imperative, and are the forerunners and prophecy of great achievements. The church that has them is impatient of routine and commonplace. It gets spiritual vision and grows inventive, that it may be ready for the multiplying demands that press upon it. It becomes prudent of time, keen to discern occasion, alert to improve opportunity, every power pressed into service. In the old mythology Atlas was the giant of giants, his feet planted on some nether world, his head towering to the stars; but when he was pictured as carrying

the globe it was with bowed shoulders, bent form, every muscle tense under the load. And when the Church is mastered by the conviction that to the extent of its capacity it is responsible for the world, there will inevitably result the mustering of every available force, every sinew and fiber of strength will be braced to sustain the weight, every faculty and energy will be mobilized and work along one line of endeavor. And nothing human is mightier than the concentrated working of a cultured, consecrated, fully developed, consciously responsible Christian manhood and womanhood. It attempts great things, may expect great things, and will not be disappointed. There is no truth ever learned, no experience ever felt, that carries with it such inspiration and promise of success as the conviction and the confession, "I am debtor."

III. — PAUL WAS WILLING TO MEET THE DEMANDS MADE UPON HIM.

He intelligently surrendered himself to his life-work. More clearly than most men he recognized the exhaustiveness of the claims that were being pressed. The Greek and the barbarian, the wise and the foolish, had plead their cause

with him, and his answer to them had been, "I am your debtor." And now Rome and the vast empire of which Rome was the representative was calling for his presence and help, and to these accumulating demands his response was, "I am ready." He makes no excuse of overwork already. He dismisses without a word the difficulty of a long and dangerous voyage. He recognizes his opportunity as his commission, and his whole consecrated manhood utters itself in the single sentence, "I am ready."

It is safe to augur great things from such a disposition as that on the part of the Christian Church. Unwilling work is always half-done work, but enthusiasm even in a bad cause is sure of its victories. It is the fire and hammer that breaks the flintiest rock in pieces. It is a large advantage gained when the assent of the heart keeps company with the decision of the will. Purpose is the body, but feeling is the soul, of consecration. The constraints of conscience can never match in efficiency the inspirations of love.

And if the Church is to do successful missionary work it must have always in its heart, as well as on its lips, the words "I am ready." Nor must it omit to range with them those other words of the

apostle, "As much as in me lies." "As much as in us lies, we are ready. We are heartily enlisted in this enterprise. All that we have and all that we are is freely and joyfully placed at its service —hands to work for it, feet to run for it, head to think for it, heart to feel for it. Soul and body, time and energy, capacity and possessions, these all shall be given to it gladly, unreservedly, and forever."

The beginnings of this complete consecration are of course wrought by the Spirit of God, but its culture and growth are effected by human agencies. The readiness to spend and be spent for the evangelization of the world increases in proportion as the reality of the need and the possibilities of the work press vividly upon the thought, and the understanding of these comes through minute acquaintance with the facts. However grace reigned in the apostle's soul, who can doubt that his enthusiasm kindled as he enumerated in thought the splendors of the imperial city, and saw how, under the glitter and pomp of externals, vice and squalor and wretchedness were eating out the life of society, and then remembered that the gospel of which he was the messenger was mighty enough to arrest all this

rot of evil, so that purity and righteousness should be at the heart of things, and Capitoline and Tiber and Forum should get their chief glory from the light of God that lay on them all. Beyond question, the actual and the possible of Rome, what was and what might be, the foul fading into the fair like the dissolving views of the optician's lantern, were often before the apostle's mental eye, and so quickened his zeal that it uttered itself in the announcement: "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." Some such panoramic views of the need and promise of the work should be a part of the education of the Church in missionary zeal. They have wonderful power. I sat awhile ago in a council assembled to ordain as missionary a young man who had for some years been a teacher in Micronesia. The candidate read his statement of belief, and then, instead of the usual formula of theological inquisition, there followed questionings as to how he taught this and that doctrine to the natives and how they received it. To most of us Micronesia had been only a station of the American Board, or at best only a few blotches of black on a wall-map. But as the narrative of the candidate went on, the blankness

of the canvas gave place to the blue of the Pacific; the ugly blotches changed to coral islands rising above the waves, clasping in their circling sweep the quiet lagoons. There was the waving of the palm-trees and the fragrance of tropical blossoms. The nebulous indistinctness resolved itself into groups of eager worshipers, assembling to listen to the Word of God. We caught the flash of their bright-colored garments, heard the songs of Zion in their unknown tongue, saw the look on their devout, upturned faces. The some *what* had changed to the some *thing;* the unknown had become the known, and from every man's heart there was the upleaping to every man's lips of the words, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Micronesia also." When the actuality of the need and the possibilities of the work changed from abstractions to living realities, enthusiasm was inevitable.

And the means of quickening a vivid conception of the largeness of the work, and of fanning into fervor a zeal for its accomplishment, are within easy reach of the modern Church. Within the last quarter of a century a distinctively missionary literature has grown up which finds its

way to the home and hand of every man who is willing to receive it. The secular press has recognized the situation, and in the same issue in which it records the rise and fall of stocks and merchandise it chronicles the victories and hopes of the Church of God in the remotest lands. The geographer maps out for us the conformation of the pagan world; the ethnologist instructs us in its race peculiarities; the artist pictures for us in graphic sketches the beauties and wonders of its natural scenery and the groups and incidents of its strange social and religious life; scholarly reviews discuss the necessity and the best methods of evangelistic work. Heathendom may be, and ought to be, as present and well comprehended a reality to the Christian Church as the condition of a neighboring commonwealth. The facilities for knowledge are numberless; nothing but indifference or blindness can keep us in ignorance.

And certainly the Church of to-day ought to find immense inspiration in the fact that the work of Christian missions has passed beyond the tentative and timid stage. The evangelization of the world is no longer a possibility to be tested. The history of three quarters of a century has demonstrated that it is an ideal which can be realized.

There is wonderful difference between to-day and that yesterday of 1812. In February of that year the first missionaries of the American Board were ordained in the city of Salem. It was the launching of what was considered to be a doubtful experiment. An immense audience witnessed the impressive scene. The students of the theological seminary walked from Andover, twenty miles away, and back again at night. The surrounding towns were largely represented in the gathering. But the spectacle was that of a funeral rather than a festival. Dr. Woods, of Andover, the preacher, seemed weighted down with the sorrow of the occasion. In his closing remarks, he said: "Dear young men, I will not break your hearts and my own by dwelling on the affecting circumstances of this parting scene. If you must go, I will animate and comfort you. Remember that though we must leave you He whom your soul loveth will not, and at the glorious appearing of the Son of God we hope to see you dearly beloved, and those whom you may rescue from pagan darkness, at His right hand." There was a gloom overhanging all the services, a grief in every heart. The doxology was a wail and the benediction sounded like a miserere.

It is our happiness, and our responsibility as well, that we live in times when the uncertainty of beginnings is a thing of the past. The success of Christian missions is an assured and resplendent fact. These thousands who have come up from all parts of the land are assembled for a jubilee. The music of the hour is the sound of festival trumpets. All continents and peoples are here represented. Swart Africa with her tawny mantle of desert and shaggy girdle of mountains, who has looked out of large sad eyes for deliverance since the age of the Pharaohs, and Japan the hermit nation, and opulent China long shut up in the enclosure of her sacred wall, and Moslemdom that has had no light for centuries but that of the pale crescent, and torrid India and Oceanica, with its kingdom of mosaic — all bring greetings and testimonies to the saving power of the gospel. Men are not asked to-day to enlist in a "forlorn hope" and risk all on a desperate venture. It is only to swell the ranks of an advancing and triumphant host. Out of Scripture, and current providence, and luminous history, and enlarging opportunities, the voice of God is summoning his Church — "Go ye into all the world." How can it bear, and how shall it dare, to be disobedient to the heavenly calling?

XI.

The Stone at the Door.

XI.

THE STONE AT THE DOOR.

"*And they were saying among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb? and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back.*" — MARK 16: 3, 4.

THERE is something pathetic and yet something not altogether reasonable about the trouble of these women on their way to the place where Jesus Christ was buried. They had serious occasion for sorrow and fear. The man whom they had followed so long, who had conquered their respect by his character and secured their confidence by his wonderful teachings, and wound his way into their affections by his gentleness and tenderness, and had so centered upon himself the loyalty of their heads and hearts that they had come to believe in him devoutly and entirely as God's promised Messiah who was to deliver them from civil bondage and give them a place in the new kingdom which he was to establish — this man was dead, and had died in such a way as apparently emphasized the falsity of all that he

had ever agreed to do for them. They had reason enough for profoundest sorrow in this sudden and utter destruction of their hopes. Their life was hard enough at the best and they had made it harder by listening to him and joining their fortunes with his and so bringing upon themselves hatred and persecution and contempt. They could bear it bravely while they were cheered by great expectations, but these were all over now. The man in whom they trusted was dead and there was nothing for them to do but to go back to the old sad monotonous life of drudgery and dreariness, made all the heavier and cloudier by their disappointment. There was cause enough for grief in all this, and yet as we see them making their way to Christ's tomb their principal trouble seems to be that the door of the tomb is closed with a stone, and they do not see how they are to find a way of opening it to pay their last respects to the body of the man they loved. They may have silently thought or openly talked of their loss and shed bitter tears over their disappointment, but there is no record of it. Inspiration has preserved for us only the thought that was uppermost in their minds, the thought that found expression in the

anxious question, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?"

And yet strange as that seems, how very human a thing it was. A man's latest trouble is usually the foremost thought in his mind. The freshness of a sorrow, in some respects and for a while, counts for more than its size. Some great calamity when it is past is quite put out of its place, in our estimate of it, by some new trial or vexation that is really quite insignificant in comparison. Time, with the changes it brings, has a wonderful effect in quieting or deadening the sensibilities. And that result does not argue the lack of deep and fine feeling. I think rather that it is a provision of the divine mercy put into our make-up to save us from being crushed by life's heavy loads which we are all appointed to bear. I know that there is power in human sympathy, and that to have the alleviations and light side of our troubles pointed out helps to make us submissive, but after all there is very little comfort given by comforting pure and simple. It falls on deaf ears and a dull heart. It is the thought of the new duty to be done, the edge of the fresh trial, the sound of another battle close at hand that stirs the thick blood in

the sluggish veins, and makes us feel that there is still something for which we ought to be glad to live. How often you see that. Some mother is bowed with grief over the body of her dead child, irresponsive if not repellent of all attempts to console her. Loving words, kindly sympathy, great promises of God, how powerless they all are to comfort her. But let sickness of ever so slight a sort seize some other member of the family and what a change is wrought. The new fear crowds out the old fact. Her sensibilities gravitate away from the past toward the future, and her whole soul goes out in care and tenderness for the fresh sufferer and through that strange channel relief comes to the soul. The mystery and mercy of the sorrow of life we do not half comprehend. Like the old palimpsest manuscripts, those strange sheets of parchment, on which first the scholar wrote his treatise, and over which by-and-by the artist spread his colors, blotting out the old record by the fresh tracings, and later the poet inscribed his lines, his poem hiding both painting and treatise; the last enrollment was the thing men saw although all the rest were underneath. So these human experiences of ours lie in strata, one above another,

the old sorrow covered and obscured with the new grief, and here and there an overlining of joy, and the latest handwriting of providence, though relatively light, still uppermost and face to face with us. It is infinite mercy, not human fickleness this. Past griefs if not tempered and softened by new trials and duties and demands would be too much for us. The quick pressing consciousness of the mass of life's sorrows at any one instant would slay us as swiftly and surely as a thunderbolt. It was a good thing for the women on the way to the grave of their dead Christ that they were anxiously questioning, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?" It was not without a purpose either that inspiration preserved for us the record of that peculiar phase of their trouble.

But the anticipated difficulty though it troubled them did not utterly dishearten them. They did not know who would roll them away the stone from the door of the tomb, but they did know where the tomb was, and which way they must go to reach it, and whether the stone was rolled away or not would make no difference to them if they were not on the spot. Going back to Jerusalem would not help matters. If

they were in earnest in their purpose then it was their duty to advance just as far toward fulfilling it as they possibly could and not to cry halt until they were absolutely and hopelessly blocked. And so, brave, tender, faithful hearts, they keep on their anxious way, and when they come to the tomb the sun is risen, "and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back." One step at a time they advance along the path of duty, and when the end of the road is reached the reward of their fidelity is greater than faith dared to anticipate.

That is the whole science of living, packed into smallest possible compass. Difficulty present or prospective is to be overcome by doing known duty. This is a matter practical to every body. There are no unobstructed lives. Obstacles real or imaginary are always in the way, and often the imaginary ones give us the most trouble. There is no open sea and plain sailing. The channel is circuitous, shoals and reefs on the right hand and the left. There is sometimes a painful sense of insecurity, but there is no sin in that provided a man neither turns back in his course nor suffers himself to drift. There is always clear water at least a vessel's length ahead, and

it is a man's first duty to cover that distance. It does one good to feel insecure, so far as that feeling makes him watchful and careful, but it is no excuse for not keeping on until he can absolutely go no further. And a Christian man has no reason, as he has no right, to be despondent. This life, that seems so thickset with difficulties, is the life appointed him by his Father and Redeemer, and God is faithful who will not suffer him to be tempted above that which he is able to bear, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape. That is universal law, the highest law of the highest love, applicable and operative in all exigencies large and small. A man is to do, not dream; to advance, not to anticipate. And one thing is certain, the man in the presence of actual difficulty, who, with simple trust in God, and with the brave spirit that says, "I will either find or make a way through it," keeps straight on, will either do it or have it done for him. And one other thing is certain, that in most cases when we march boldly toward our difficulties, in spite of our impulse to turn back, it will be found when we reach them that they are not so impassable as they seemed at a distance. The stone at the door of the sepulcher, which in our

thought of it would prevent our entrance, and which we were sure we had no strength to roll away, when we get to the sepulcher will be found not to be there at all. Coming westward across the Atlantic, the traveler, as he nears the Grand Banks, sees some morning ahead of him a gray wall rising up out of the sea stretching the whole diameter of the horizon, cold, hard, threatening, impenetrable, preventing all further progress. But as the ship keeps on her course toward it, gets nearer, at last touches it, it proves to be obscurity not solidity, mist not granite, and pushing her way into it, following the sailing track laid down on the chart, watching the compass and the lead, keeping a steady hand at the helm, the vessel pushes her way through it, and comes out on the other side into clear sunshine, and into sight of the blue shore-line of the continent lifting itself above the dip of the waves. And when men set their faces toward God, and move on in the divinely ordered course of their lives, many obstructions that seemed in the distance to be impassable, turn out in the actual encounter with them to be shadow, not substance, and faith and courage peer into them and through them, and come out beyond them

into the sparkle of the unclouded sea and into the serene and blessed experience of those of whom God says, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

We ought specially to keep all this in mind in the matter of our spiritual difficulties. There are two things in particular which make it hard for men to enter or to go a great way in religious life. There are certain truths to be believed which they do not understand and they feel sure they never can understand; there are certain duties to perform which they do not do and they are sure they never can do. There is a stone before the door of the sepulcher, and they are not able to roll it away and get to their Lord. That is a very common state of mind. It is a real hindrance to many men; it serves as an excuse for a great many others. And yet it ought not to be a least hindrance to one who sincerely desires to live a Christian life, and it certainly is not the shadow of an apology for indifference and inaction. There are some simple first things about which we are all of us perfectly sure. There is not a person here but knows as well as he knows any thing that he ought to do his utmost to be just as true and good as he

possibly can, that day by day he ought to ask God to help him understand his will, and help him be and do just what he ought to be and do, that he ought to study his Bible to find out what it teaches about the rules that should govern his conduct, and how he shall take care of his immortal soul, and make ready for that eternity into which all men haste. There is hardly a child here that can not understand that much, for it is nothing to understand but something very simple to do. And yet that is just what irreligious people have not done. They let it alone and talk about the difficulty they find in understanding and believing. I don't understand about inspiration, one man says, and I don't believe that the Bible is an inspired book. Has any body asked you to start with understanding and believing that? Do you own an inspired almanac? But that does not hinder you from looking into it to find out what time the sun will rise to-morrow, or what day of the week the first of May comes, and you arrange your business accordingly. Yes, but you say, I have used the almanac a great many years and always found it correct. Precisely. Have you used your Bible a great many years and found out by your own

experience that it is inaccurate? The matter of inspiration is not up for discussion just yet. The first question to be settled is whether the Bible is true or whether any thing in it is true, and that is only found out by putting it to the test of experiment. If a principle or rule is true, no matter where the truth came from, it is every honest man's business to put it into practice.

Do you ask what all this has to do with the matter we are considering? It has every thing to do with it. It is our Lord's promise and the supreme law in his kingdom. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." Every body can learn the truth in that way; no body can learn it in any other way. Let a man start out along that line, doing the things which are true and right, just as fast as he finds out what things are right and true, and because they are right and true, and all these mountains of difficulty in the shape of unintelligible doctrine will one after another vanish away. The doctrine of regeneration which seems to you so strange and obscure will cease to trouble you if you do what you certainly know how to do, — offer the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." The

mystery of the atonement is no longer a troublesome mystery when you do what you can simply and intelligently do, trust your single self with your weakness and ignorance and sin to the mercy of your Redeemer.

The path of obedience is the path of gracious revelation. So the women found it. They anticipated difficulty at the door of the sepulcher, but all the same they kept on their way toward it, and when they reached the dreaded spot the difficulty they foresaw was gone. It is always so in the religious life. The path of doing which leads to light may be very narrow and all shut in at the start, but it widens as we go on and opens broader prospect, and just as the mountaineer climbing upward finds the footpath through the tangle of underbrush and the thick-leaved woods a mere thread with nothing to see before or behind, or on either side but the path itself, but keeping on comes out at last on to the broad, bare ledges, where there is nothing to hide from his sight the broad landscape below him or the great heavens above him, and his eye sweeps the vast expanse of earth beneath him where men sin and suffer and struggle and conquer, and the infinite sky over him, behind whose measureless azure are the

domes and spires of the New Jerusalem of God, so the obedient soul content to do the little it knows now, and the more it will know to-morrow, is certain at last to reach the height where God's love and God's grace and God's truth, in its loftiest as well as its lowest ranges, will all be unrolled before it in panoramic clearness and splendor, and life and death and immortality will hold no secrets hidden from it, and the man shall see as he is seen, and know as he is known, and have a share in the illimitable wisdom of God.

Just that which is true of this matter of believing is also and equally true of that other great difficulty, the matter of living. Men considering the question of personal religion look ahead and consider how much will be required of them if they enter upon the Christian life, and when they count up the sacrifices to be made, the duties to be done, the battles to be fought, the trials to be endured, the service to be rendered, the interminable series of demands of all sorts and sizes which will be pressed upon them, they say, "It is too much, we can never discharge the responsibility; who is sufficient for these things? Certainly not we." Now there are two things to be said about that. One is that it

is quite possible that not a single struggle, sacrifice, demand, which we anticipate will ever form a part of our experience. The women were sure that they should find a great stone rolled against the door of the tomb, but when they reached the spot there was no stone there. God deals with us one by one. He fits the back to the burden and the burden to the back. The load which is too heavy for you, he will never ask you to carry; the trial too sharp for you, he will never call you to endure. And this other thing also is to be said. In whatever we may have to do or endure, what is impossible to us will be done for us. There was a great stone at the door of Christ's tomb too heavy for the women to handle, and so Almightiness rolled it away before they reached it. Speculatively there are insuperable difficulties in the way of living the Christian life, but practically there are none — for we are workers together with God, who does the most of the work, working in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. We misread the blessed significance of Christ's sepulcher, unless we think of that stone at its door, not as it was and where it was on the night after the crucifixion, but as it was and where it was on the morning of the resurrection.

But there is a still larger and more wonderful truth which the text teaches and this memorable day emphasizes. "And very early on the first day of the week, they come to the tomb . . . and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back." Why was it rolled back? All over the hill-slope adjacent to Joseph's garden were hundreds of tombs, and every one of them had a stone before its door. Some of them had been there a great while, and the cement of time had bolted door and tomb together, and wandering dust had sifted into the crevices, and the grasses had rooted themselves in it, and the wild vines had clambered over the gray rock, and which was tomb and which was door the eye could not distinguish. How happened it that that solitary stone among the multitudes was rolled away? Is there any answer but this — because the Lord whom it shut into the silence and darkness of death was risen to die no more? What were all other barriers to him when death itself could not hold him? What was that rock-door to his resurrection power but the grain of dust in the path of the whirlwind? A half-score of men with the heave of their shoulders could roll away that stone, but all the generations of men that

had peopled the earth for four thousand years could not unloose one least finger of that grim death who had them all in his dread grasp. It was little for Him, the mighty Conqueror, to do, to make clear passage-way for himself into the outer world.

So is it with all hindrances and resistances that obstruct the chosen way of this risen Lord. Their stoutest opposition has not even the obstructing force of a shadow. What infinite strength and comfort there is in that thought! If you are a friend and disciple of Christ, you may be entirely at rest about yourself, even though men who do not know the hidings of your power may feel certain that you will be crushed by your sorrows and losses. Have you not abundant reason to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"? You need not be troubled about the permanence of his truth, though men snarl at it, criticize it, mangle it, distort it, boast of its overthrow, and seat on the throne of popular favor another gospel which is not His Gospel. The risen Christ lives in his truth, and one pulse-beat of his power which shook the dark kingdoms of the dead suffices to crush to dishonored and shapeless dust every

Babel tower which the pride of human reason builds, with which to scale his heavens and make itself God. You need have no anxiety about the future of his kingdom, though the multitudes of the people love darkness and only a few rejoice in the light, though the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed, though worldliness and greed and ambition and passion and hate and unbelief confederate to say to the rise of the mighty tide, Thus far shalt thou go and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed. One silent decree of Him who found the grave only a cobweb in the path of his purpose, and thrones crumble, and dynasties perish, and nations vanish like smoke; one glance of his, and louder than the boom of the sea or the roar of the storm rises the clamor of the inhabitants of the earth crying, "Rocks fall upon us, hills cover us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Heaven and earth may pass away, but this risen Christ and his truth and his kingdom shall never pass away.

And especially remember to-day that this risen Christ, who tasted death for every man, conquered

death for every man. It is a strange and awful thing to die. There is no other presence in which we feel so helpless and hopeless. Still limbs, pale face, white lips, silent voice, rigid hands, sightless eyes, moveless heart, hushed house, closed coffin, slow procession, open grave, falling clods, decay and dust, — this is death. And we every one must die. How much of sweetest human hope and affection is hidden away to-day under the greening sods of the new spring-time! Is there any power? we ask in the agony of our infinite grief — is there any power that can give us back our beloved, or give us ourselves again to ourselves when we have gone as they have gone? And history answers, "no," and human reason answers, "no," and boastful science answers, "no," and the silence of the burial-places where our dead lie answers "no." The only voice of hope and comfort comes out from that solitary sepulcher on the hill-slope in Judæa, from whose door the stone has been rolled away. But what a voice that is, the voice of the mighty Conqueror who has himself trodden down death, and led captivity captive! Listen to him you who are both mourners and mortals. "Because I live, ye shall live also." "I am the resurrection,

and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Hear how holy apostles catch up and prolong the assurance, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." "For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Is there any light on the dark path? any hope for the dead and those who are soon to die? Light? there is broadest day and the splendor of outpoured sunshine; hope? there is more than hope, invincible assurance, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

There are many strange sights in this world of ours, but nothing so strange, I think, as to see men pressed with the cares and troubles of life, the dust of their beloved dead under their feet, their own graves close before them, and all eternity to follow, and yet indifferent or defiant in their attitude toward their Redeemer and Lord who died for their sins and was raised again for their justification; men who are alike unmoved at the

foot of the cross and the open door of the sepulcher. This thoughtlessness and recklessness and ingratitude, every-where about us, what is it all but the confirmation of the old saying of the gospel? — "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

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